

ALBERT J. RUSSELL:  
HIS LIFE AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO FLORIDA PUBLIC EDUCATION

BY

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by

Fred C. Reynolds

To  
Abbie M. Baker

whose love for, and loving tribute  
to Albert J. Russell made this  
study possible.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
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by

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Major Department: Educational Leadership

By the time of his death in 1896, Albert J. Russell had become one of Florida's leading statesmen, Democratic spokesmen, and educational administrators. During his lifetime, he was known everywhere in the state as "the silver-tongued orator of Florida." Today, his name remains largely unrecognized, even by most Florida historians. This study provides a biography of Russell emphasizing his contributions to Florida education. Three basic questions of the research were where and how did Russell receive the background and motivation for his educational contributions to Florida; what were the contributions to Florida education specifically attributable to Russell; and what were the historical events and social relationships that made possible the scope of his contributions to Florida education?

Russell, trained as an architect, arrived in Florida in 1860. He joined the Confederacy in 1861 as a 2nd lieutenant in the St. Johns Grays, under the command of J.J. Daniel. By war's end, Russell had been promoted to major. After the war, he became a leading contractor in restoring war-torn Jacksonville, and within a few years had become one of the city's most prominent citizens. In 1875, he was elected to succeed Samuel Pasco as Grand Master of the Masons.

After Reconstruction, Russell was appointed Duval County Superintendent of Schools. In 1884, William D. Bloxham appointed Russell as State Superintendent of Public Instruction; he remained in this capacity until 1893, serving on the cabinets of three governors--Bloxham, Perry and Fleming. During these nine years, acceptance of public education increased so dramatically the number of schools and students more than doubled. Schools became "graded," and high schools as well as higher education were added to the system. Russell, named the "Father of the Florida Education Association," advanced teacher education tremendously, helped organize the first state-wide teacher organization and encouraged the publication of the State's first educational journal, The Florida School Journal.

This researcher concluded that Russell's contributions to Florida and to the state's educational system make him a statesman and educator of extraordinary stature. Documentation and publications of his contributions will lead to greater recognition of Russell and, consequently, an even more accurate history of Florida.

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Albert J. Russell was born in Petersburg, Virginia, on January 15, 1829. He attended Anderson Seminary in Petersburg, where it is likely Russell received the foundations of his belief in a meritocratic and publicly educated society.<sup>1</sup> His early professional career education was apprenticeship in the business of architecture and building. Russell came to Florida in 1859 and enlisted in the Confederate Army in Jacksonville on July 13, 1861.<sup>2</sup> By war's end he had achieved the rank of Major and spent his last military days in command of troops agitating the advances of Sherman's march through Georgia. During Reconstruction, according to the late Governor Harrison Reed, he was Jacksonville's "leading contractor in restoring the waste places and reconstructing the city after the war."<sup>3</sup> Russell also edited a Jacksonville newspaper, The Breeze, and served in local and state politics, always a champion of the Democratic Party. He became a Grand Master and Grand Secretary of the Masons and, in 1877, Superintendent of Schools for Duval County. In 1884 Governor Bloxham appointed him State Superintendent of Public Schools and he served in this capacity until 1893. During those years he dramatically increased the popularity of public education; was prominent

in the establishment of the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine, the Agricultural College at Lake City (soon to become the University of Florida), the first teacher institutes; and advocated the theoretical study of industrial arts throughout the educational system. Russell was the state's first elected Superintendent of Schools and served in the cabinet of three governors--Bloxham, Perry and Fleming. He was throughout an eloquent public speaker and was nicknamed "Florida's silver-tongued orator."

Not only does Albert J. Russell make an interesting study, historically there is a need to document and publish accounts of his vast contributions to Florida and to Florida education for two reasons. First, there are to date only two published accounts specific to Russell; an article in Florida Educators published in 1959 and the Life and Labors of Albert J. Russell.<sup>4</sup> The former relied almost exclusively on the latter for references, and the latter is more a festschrift than a historical study, published by Russell's wife a year after his death. Secondly, secondary sources, books and articles on the Bourbon Era, Jacksonville, and even education between 1880 and 1900, speak often of Russell's accomplishments and contributions but practically never mention his name. There exist whole segments of information, either missing or incorrect, surrounding Russell - the official report from the Florida Department of Education, for example, Florida Superintendents of Schools 1845 - 1983, does not even list Russell as County



Superintendent for the years he served in Duval, 1877 - 1884.<sup>5</sup> Edward Williamson's Florida Politics in the Gilded Age, which covers the Bourbons, Populists, Farmer's Alliance, and the Constitutional Convention of 1885, has not a single reference to A. J. Russell.<sup>6</sup> Outside of listing cabinet officers, the same is true for William Cash's The History of the Democratic Party in Florida.<sup>7</sup> Yet this was a man who was easily one of the most democratic of all Floridians, who stumped the state several times for the Democratic Party; was a delegate to several Democratic conventions; was twice a Presidential elector; was a close personal friend to three governors (Reed, Perry, Fleming); and served on the governor's cabinet for no less than three administrations; and, according to several primary sources, including the Florida School Journal, was a possible nominee for governor.<sup>8</sup>

Russell is mentioned, more than in any other place, in histories dealing with the growth of Florida education. Nita Katherine Pyburn named him the "Father of the Graded School," a title given to him for his contributions to elementary and high schools.<sup>9</sup> George Gary Bush, who authored Florida's first published book of educational history, cites Russell as marshalling in "a new era of education," as does another prominent educational historian, Thomas Everette Cochran.<sup>10</sup> For his efforts to professionalize teaching and education, the Florida Education Association named him the "Father of the F.E.A."<sup>11</sup> But even when Russell is given credit for his contributions, full credit is often lacking. His

contributions to Florida education beyond the high school level, for example, are often overlooked. What many have failed to recognize is that crucial to his vision for an "Educational Superstructure" was the development of a well established system of higher education - colleges and universities that would retain the state's most academically talented youth after high school, train elementary and secondary teachers, and expand research facilities for agriculture, Florida's most important industry. It could even be argued that the emergence of the University of Florida as the state's pre-eminent university is due in large part to Albert J. Russell. Russell consistently applied his efforts towards furthering higher education, lamenting that Florida "has entrusted to distant states a work which is her own duty to perform."<sup>12</sup>

Even though secondary sources often ignore or circumvent Russell's influence, the primary sources clearly illuminate them. While not exactly revisionist, this biography will at least correct the record in several accounts and, more importantly perhaps, will give fitting honor almost a hundred years after his death, to part of the inscriptions on his tombstone:

He Gave to Florida Its  
Real Public School System

Writing a historical biography in light of so little published research and so much incorrect information necessitated a serious, comprehensive, and exhaustive work. The

task would have been made much simpler if this study could limit itself to the "educational contributions" of A. J. Russell, but such a study would not only be limited, it would fail in its validity and in its historical significance. While it is true that were it not for Russell's superintendency, and had not those nine years been so especially important to the educational system we have today, this or any other biography probably would never be written about him. But a study concentrating on education would fail to recognize precisely why Russell's contributions are so noteworthy, for it was Russell's labors outside education that enabled his contributions to education to have such lasting consequences.

This study, then, proposes as well as to provide historical documentation to help determine the causes and many of the consequences of A. J. Russell's contributions to Florida education.

Answers were sought for these research questions:

1. What were the biographical, educational and vocational features that influenced Russell's educational philosophy?
2. What were the military, political, civic and religious activities that contributed to Russell's success as popular spokesman for Florida public education?
3. What were the specific contributions Russell made toward the establishment and success of The Florida School

for the Deaf and Blind, The Agricultural College at Lake City, teacher training, and the Florida Education Association.

4. What role and what effect did Russell have in shaping the educational platform during the Constitutional Convention of 1885, a platform largely responsible for Florida's educational system we have today?

5. What were the contributions Russell made to earn him the title "Father of the graded school," and what were the contributions specific to the creation of a uniform system of high schools in the state?

6. What were the contributions Russell made toward establishing a system of higher education in Florida, especially toward what are today Florida State University and the University of Florida?

7. In what ways did national educational policy and prominent American educators influence Russell's superintendency, and how did Florida compare to the rest of the nation during and immediately after Russell's terms in office?

8. In the three years remaining in Russell's life after leaving the office of Superintendent, how do the fraternal, civic, religious activities and letters round out the life, philosophy, and contributions of Albert J. Russell?

### Need for the Study

The late Nita Katherine Pyburn, probably the most prolific of contemporary Florida educational historians, wrote an article about the first report of a Superintendent of Schools for the State of Florida because, "It is of value to those who are interested in their heritage."<sup>13</sup> Cochran's classic 1921 text History of Public-School Education in Florida says that his purpose was "to give an account of what has been accomplished in such a way that it will lead to a better understanding of present day problems."<sup>14</sup>

In 1932 Boyce Fowler Ezell published The Development of Secondary Education in Florida, a study he undertook for its "historical worth" and "value as a basis for appraising the secondary unit of Florida's educational system as it exists today."<sup>15</sup> In Higher Education in Transition Brubacher and Rudy said, "The record of higher education in this country is a mirror of our social and intellectual history."<sup>16</sup> Ary, Jacobs and Razavich's Introduction to Research in Education define historical research as "the attempt to establish facts and arrive at conclusions concerning the past" and "the hoped-for result is increased understanding of the present and a more rational basis for making present choices."<sup>17</sup>

For a historian, indeed for any person interested in his heritage, there exists no need to justify the study of history; and yet this particular study is needed for a far

greater reason than "knowledge for the sake of knowledge." Ezell noted that his work's value was also a weakness because "no history of secondary education in Florida has ever been written."<sup>18</sup> The author of a biography of Albert J. Russell is in somewhat the same situation because no historical biography has ever been written about one of the most important forces in Florida educational history. Not only was Russell important, but the times often saw violent, philosophical, and legal changes to the state's constitution as well as to its educational system.

A study, especially a Florida study of the Civil War, reconstruction, carpetbaggery, Republican rule leading to Democratic rule, Populism, the Bourbon Era, the Farmer's Alliance, the Constitutional Convention of 1885 if told completely and accurately, must include the effects Albert J. Russell had upon them. The "New School Law" of 1889, considered by most educational historians today to be the very foundation of our current system of education in Florida, according to Cochran "was framed by Honorable Albert J. Russell"<sup>19</sup>; and according to Pyburn he was "the father" of it.<sup>20</sup>

William Sheats, Russell's successor, and Superintendent from 1893-1905 and 1913-1922, took issue with Russell's significance, reporting that he "was the author of all but one of [the] provisions"<sup>21</sup>; and this point of contention adds further historical interest to the school law. The emergence of normal schools, which provided teacher

education; higher education, where there was practically none; and even the existence of the University of Florida and its location in Gainesville, still have their indebtedness lying in the shadows of the past.

There is yet another need for this study of Albert J. Russell. Many of the records of his life's work have suffered the ravages of time and fire; fragmentary documentation is scattered throughout the state and the South. The record of his Superintendency of Duval County, as well as the minutes of the Board of Education--records that would yield important facts regarding the acknowledged superiority and leadership of Duval County schools, not to mention Duval High School, the first "graded school" in the State--have been mostly, if not entirely burned...three times. Lee E. Bigelow, who wrote "Public Schools of Duval County" in 1939, reported

The Jacksonville Courthouse, where such records should have been filed, was burned by the Federals on the occasion of one of their evacuations of Jacksonville. In 1891 the offices of the Board of Public Instruction of Duval County were destroyed by fire, and the same disaster again occurred in 1901 thus leaving the only authoritative records existing here in Jacksonville, those from the school year of 1902-1938.<sup>22</sup>

Not only have Duval County records been destroyed by fire, so too were much of Russell's records with the Masons, a fraternal organization that occupied a considerable portion of over two-thirds of his life. Masonry is important to a study of Russell for more than a

"well-rounded" perspective. Reading speeches, reports, and letters written by Russell, one can easily see a philosophical motif existing between education and masonry; and doubtless this study will reveal how one influenced the other. Yet immediately after Russell's death, the special committee assigned to write his history reported:

As a Mason we cannot find any record of his former history. The records and lodge books containing the Masonic history of all the members of Solomon Lodge No. 20, and Duval Lodge No. 18, were destroyed by fire a few years ago, and every vestige of his Masonic record lost; therefore we will have to supply what we can from memory.<sup>23</sup>

So, however destroyed, lost or discarded, records of Albert J. Russell exist; even many of the ones thought destroyed exist. Today in Jacksonville there is an Albert J. Russell Lodge and records have filtered down into it. Some Duval County School Board records exist in the Florida Archives in Tallahassee; and, of course, there are countless and invaluable accounts, reports and records of his years as State Superintendent in both the Florida State Archives and Legislative Library. Jacksonville was Russell's home, and the Florida Times-Union has any number of articles on microfilm that either involve or are about Russell. The Haydon Burns Library in Jacksonville has Civil War records, city directories and even an original copy of Russell's newspaper The Breeze. The library also has microfilm copies of several other newspapers now gone, including The Florida



Journal, The Florida News, and The Florida Union, which also report on Russell.

There is one other area of Russell's life that has not been mentioned. It is important because it best represents the misfortune and the "bad luck" Albert J. Russell has had in gaining historical recognition. Early in this writer's research on Russell, it was discovered that Russell had initiated the idea for a home in Jacksonville for old Confederate veterans. For almost three years Russell lobbied the legislature, rallied public support, and solicited contributions. When the committee for the Home was ultimately incorporated, he was elected President. Russell delivered the dedication address, followed by his friend and the ex-governor F. P. Fleming, who was then committee chairman. Almost a hundred years later, an inquiry as to the whereabouts of the Old Confederate Home records brought the response that a recent library remodeling had resulted in the accidental discovery of two boxes filled with the Home's records and that a special committee had been formed to assimilate and collate them. Finally, two black bound volumes were ceremoniously presented to the library's Florida Room collection. But inside the two volumes, containing all the surviving records of the Old Confederate Home, there is not one single reference to its founder, leading spokesman, solicitor of funds, or first President. Once again history had overlooked and failed to give proper credit to Albert J. Russell.<sup>24</sup>

### Limitations and Assumptions

The present research was limited to the "life and labors" of Albert J. Russell, with its primary purpose being to illustrate the importance of and the contributions made by Russell to Florida's public educational system. Except for a few necessary biographical details, this study began with the year 1859 when he first arrived in Florida at the age of 30. Just enough biographical information was included to identify historically such figures as William D. Bloxham, Edward A. Perry, Francis P. Fleming--all governors of Florida--and William N. Sheats, Russell's successor to office, and to determine the relationship and influence each had on the other.

This biography of necessity depended heavily on the Life and Labors of Albert J. Russell, a collection of extracts of speeches, reports and tributes collected by his wife. Mrs. Russell came not to bury her husband but to praise him. And as to her work, one admirer best typified the entire contents of the book when he wrote:

De Mortuis nil nisi bonum, the beautiful injunction of the ancients will apply with peculiar force when the pen of the future historian touches the life and the life-work of this good and great man; for there will be nothing but good to say.<sup>25</sup>

Any research and especially any historical research has limitations, and any first study is bound to be guilty at some time of omissions on one hand and grandiloquence on

the other. Indeed with the latter, any biographer would need to be extremely cautious, for Russell was as popular a public figure as he was a positive thinker, possessive of a cheerful and optimistic personality.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, in spite of his years of professional training and work as an architect and builder, his many administrative duties in the Confederate Army, and fraternal and public office, details were not a priority with him, and he often exaggerated to make his point. Most of his speeches, even the most important speeches of his life, were delivered without notes; rather than facts, he depended on a quick supplication to God and inspiration to guide him.<sup>27</sup>

Immediately after William N. Sheats took over the office of Superintendent of Education, his first goal was to "test how large a proportion of the teachers were in reality as enthusiastic and well fitted" as Russell had reported them.

His next duty was

to improve the statistics reporting the condition of the work. Superintendent Russell was not a careful statistician, or successful gatherer of statistics.<sup>28</sup>

### Definitions

Florida educational history often involves a particular vocabulary. In some cases words have entirely different meanings today than in the past, i.e. "seminary." In other cases words have been dropped from common usage, and consequently, from understanding; i.e. "graded schools."

For purposes of clarification the following definitions are offered.

Originally, the term "academy" was interchangeable with "school," both elementary and secondary. By around 1880, however, Academy was used more exclusively for private schools.<sup>29</sup> "Common schools" were, by today's definition, elementary schools. By 1892 common schools generally required eight years of study, although in earlier Florida common schools required anywhere from three to eight years of study.<sup>30</sup> A "graded school" differed from earlier schools in one or two ways. First, grades were assigned to each course taken, and secondly, each year of study had a grade level assigned to it.<sup>31</sup> A common graded school, for example, had eight grades, requiring eight years of study to complete. The number of grades recommended by Russell for the high schools was four. Many graded schools, however, offered less than eight for their common schools and less than four for their high schools. The School Law of 1889 required graded schools, though ungraded public schools continued long after 1889.

The Florida School Law of 1849 provided for an ex-officio Superintendent of Schools for the State and ex-officio county superintendents. The Register of Public Lands was to be "by virtue of his office, Superintendent of Schools for the State." Since the Register of Lands collected money for the sale of sixteenth sections, it seemed appropriate that he should see that the money be properly

spent. Judges of Probate were to be "by virtue of their office, Superintendents of Schools for their several counties." The School Law of 1869 called for an appointive office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, but the Constitutional Convention of 1885 required public election.

"High schools," seminary and academy were often used interchangeably until common usage limited academy to private schools about 1890.<sup>32</sup> As public high schools became increasingly popular, hence more institutionalized, there remained inconsistencies within counties and between counties as to the number of grades each high school offered.<sup>33</sup> Duval High School, the state's most outstanding secondary institution, did not require four years until 1889.<sup>34</sup>

"Normal schools" were designed for teacher education and were often post-secondary. While some offered teacher education exclusively, others combined liberal arts and education classes and offered college degrees. It could be argued that Florida's first experiments with higher education outside of the Agricultural College at Lake City were normal schools.<sup>35</sup> A seminary was most often a private school. Academy and seminary meant much the same thing. Eventually, by 1880 seminary was used more exclusively for secondary schools and colleges.<sup>36</sup> Two well-known seminaries, the West Florida Seminary (now FSU) and the East Florida Seminary (now UF), were not true post-secondary institutions. In his report of 1878-80 Superintendent

Haisley converted both "into ordinary high schools" since the schools as a rule had no students outside the county in which it operated.<sup>37</sup>

According to Pyburn, the idea for a state system of education suited to the needs of a democracy was, though similar to other states, indigenous to Florida. A "single system of education" is one where elementary (common) schools prepare students for secondary schools which in turn prepare students for college at public expense. These schools combined practical and liberal arts education and maintained channels of communication both for curriculum philosophy and education.<sup>38</sup>

Russell's term "educational superstructure" is synonymous with Pyburn's "single system," although, of course, the idea originated with Russell. He first used it in his biennial report to the governor in 1886.<sup>39</sup> Also noteworthy is "industrial education," another important part of the educational superstructure. Russell argued consistently throughout his tenure as state superintendent for the inclusion of industrial education for two reasons. Firstly, traditional classical education neglected appreciation and knowledge of manual arts. All too often, students schooled in reading, writing and mathematics had no practical job skill either in principle or practice. Secondly, according to Russell,

The old manner of years past, of apprenticeship, to acquire a knowledge of these trades, became repugnant to both parents and youth, until it is

a rare thing to see a boy learning a trade as an apprentice, and therefore we are not producing the artisans and mechanics our rapid growth and progress demand.<sup>40</sup>

Russell intended for industrial education to be a part of both secondary and higher education. While he applauded Lake City's Agricultural College for its offerings in the classic curriculum, its primary interests were what Russell defined as industrial education.

No clear distinction exists between "teacher institutes" and normal schools. However, teacher institutes were more like retreats, or conferences, meeting anywhere from a few days to about two weeks in duration without any permanent location for the purpose of teacher education. The rapid growth and increasing standardization of common schools led to the rapid growth of teacher training.<sup>41</sup> Normal schools were generally housed in some permanently affixed campus, were affiliated with that school and generally had longer sessions, ranging from two weeks to two years in duration.<sup>42</sup> Russell held the first State Teacher Institute during the Florida Chautauqua at Defuniak Springs in 1886.<sup>43</sup> The state legislature authorized the first normal schools in its session of 1883, one in Gainesville and one in Tallahassee.<sup>44</sup>

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to present a biography of Albert J. Russell, emphasizing the contributions he made to Florida education. Special emphasis was given to those Russell made that are still apparent today. Russell's contributions were many. He popularized free, public education; argued for many of its philosophical constructs; prepared the foundation for the single system of education Florida has today; oversaw the beginning of state supported higher education where there was none; and lastly, began teacher education and professionalization where there was none before.

Information provided by this study serves a two-fold purpose. One, it provides information unknown to the general public and to many historians. Secondly, the study corrects much of the misinformation surrounding Russell's life and educational contributions, providing more historically accurate information and giving fitting credit to one of, if not the most important of, Florida educators.

Finally, a historical biography of Albert J. Russell provides insight to much more than the life of one man. Russell's biography provides insight into parts of the Civil War, Florida and Jacksonville history and the very foundation of the present system of education in Florida.



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27 Ibid, 156, 134, 193, 264-65.

28 Biennial Report, 1894, 33.

29 Harry Gardner Cutler, History of Florida Past and Present 3 Vols. (Chicago, 1923), I, 222-225.

30 Pyburn, Single System Education in Florida, 62.

31 Cochran, Public-School in Florida, 94-95.

32 Ezell, Development Secondary Education, 36.

33 Biennial Report, 1894, 53.

34 Jacksonville Florida Times-Union, June 3, 1889.

35 Pyburn, Single System Education in Florida, 35.

36 George Gary Bush, History of Education in Florida (Washington, 1889), 31-39.

37 Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction - 1880 (Tallahassee, 1880), 21.

38 Pyburn, Single System Education in Florida, 2.

39 House Journal, 1887, - A Journal of the Proceeding of the Home of Representatives of the 1st Legislature of the State of Florida (Tallahassee, 1887), 21.

40 "Biennial Report 1885-86," House Journal, 13.

41 Biennial Report, 1894, 45-48.

42 Ibid.

43 W. Stuart Towns, "The Florida Chautauqua: A Case Study in American Education," Southern Speech Communication Journal 42 (Spring, 1977), 236.

44 Laws of Florida, 1883, Chapter 3448. (Tallahassee, 1883), 66.

## CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature pertaining to Russell's life can be divided into three categories. First are secondary sources, primarily books on Florida history involving the development of the frontier, the Civil War, reconstruction, politics and industry. Secondly, are primary and secondary sources, involving historical studies of Florida education. Included in this category are books, journals, magazines, and reports recorded in the Florida Senate Journal and the Department of Education. Finally are the primary sources, letters and reports written by Russell, as well as minutes of meetings, senate journals, letters of tribute and photographs.

The first category, books on Florida history, is only discussed briefly since they provide more of an overview of the setting, the background of the several stages on which Russell played important roles.

### Florida History

Roland Rerick's Memoirs of Florida<sup>1</sup> was published by the Southern Historical Association in 1902 and edited by Francis P. Fleming. Evidently much financed by biographical sketches of locally prominent citizens, the two volumes embrace a general history of Florida along with special

chapters devoted to finance and banking, the bench and the bar, medicine, railroads, navigation and industrial interests. According to Fleming, the emphasis on modern Florida history was to counterbalance the other histories of Florida which devoted too much space to provincial times, rather than the more modern history that he found more interesting. Nevertheless, the history begins with the discovery and exploration and finishes with the Constitutional Convention of 1885, and includes chapters on the gubernatorial administration of Harrison Reed in 1863 through William Sherman Jennings in 1901. Interesting is the fact that Jennings was the first of the governors of Florida since the great war who was unassociated with that memorable struggle. Unfortunately, however well written, however comprehensive, the Memoirs can be described as a rambling narration, so use of the index and a fairly familiar knowledge of the state's history are necessary in order to achieve comprehensive discussions of many subjects.

What is often referred to as "the Bourbon Era" (a period following Reconstruction characterized by big banking and railroading interests) is thoroughly discussed in Edward C. Williamson's Florida Politics in the Gilded Age, 1877-1893,<sup>2</sup> a comprehensive study that includes all political history - the Farmers' Alliance, the populists, the Bourbons, democrats, republicans, and the Constitutional Convention of 1885 as well as the legislative activities throughout the entire period. Since Superintendent Russell took

office in 1884 and held it through 1893 and served on the cabinets of three of the Bourbon Era's governors, Williamson's work provides invaluable insight and facts for one of the very reasons for Russell's success as a State Superintendent of Education; he was also a prominent Democrat and an able politician.

Understanding Florida history necessitates understanding the Democratic Party in Florida. William Cash's The History of the Democratic Party in Florida<sup>3</sup> makes two distinguishing points. One, no other state in the American union has been more closely identified with the Democratic party; and two, that the government of Florida probably cooperated more closely with the government of the Confederacy than any other Southern state. Reconstruction and its associated evils of carpetbaggers, scalawags, and Republican domination served not only to unite the Democratic party but also to make its history the history of the state's interest between 1865 and 1900 as it tried both to extricate itself from Republican rule and to serve the interests of the people of Florida. The constitutional conventions; the "Rump Convention" of 1868; the Convention of 1885, the elections of Drew, Bloxham, Perry and Fleming; and the Disston Land Sale are all fully discussed along with the political rise of Albert J. Russell and William M. Sheats, Russell's successor to office.

### Florida Education

There are five classic studies of Florida educational history. The first is George Gary Bush's History of Education in Florida,<sup>4</sup> published in 1889. Bush's study was written to accompany a series of historical papers on higher education in the United States for the Secretary of the Interior. It was the first comprehensive history published on Florida education. Originally, the history was to be specific to Florida's higher education, but according to Bush, Florida, more than most other states, had its higher education so intertwined with that of the secondary and common schools that it became necessary to study all levels together. Bush also contends that Russell's Superintendency marks the beginning of a new era in Florida education. These two themes became increasingly popular as other historical studies began to make similar conclusions.

William N. Sheats, Russell's successor to office, was the first Floridian to write a comprehensive state history of education. His Bi-ennial Report of 1894<sup>5</sup> not only records educational history to date, but offers a detailed accounting of the contributions of each State Superintendent beginning with C. Thurston Chase in 1868. In office for over twenty years, (1893-1905, 1913-1922), possessive of a dynamic and forceful personality, Sheats became the most authoritative figure in State education; and his Bi-ennial Report of 1894 is probably the most cited of all other

educational studies. According to Sheats, one of Russell's greatest contributions to the school system was in popularizing it. "In arousing the popular mind to a proper appreciation of the public schools, it hardly admits of questions, that Superintendent Russell was better suited to the work and succeeded beyond any of his predecessors."<sup>6</sup> There are also detailed accounts of Russell's contributions toward teacher education, secondary and higher education, the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine, the Constitutional Convention of 1885 and the School Law of 1889.

Third is Thomas Everette Cochran's History of Public-School Education in Florida<sup>7</sup> published in 1921. Like Bush, Cochran begins Florida's second era with Russell's administration and cites seven areas of advancement attributed to it. These advancements include a public willingness to support schools by taxation, a more efficient administrative organization, better school facilities, broader courses of study, a more competent teaching staff, a more extensive system of public instruction and finally, increased school attendance. Cochran's history is important since it is the first study made with any real distance or perspective on Russell's superintendency.

Boyce Fowler Ezell's The Development of Secondary Education in Florida<sup>8</sup> was published in 1932. As the title suggests, this history was intended to provide a history of secondary schools; but similar to Bush's finding, "the



early history of secondary education during the territorial and early statehood periods is so intertwined with elementary education a separate account of its evolution is not easily written."<sup>9</sup> Although a most comprehensive and detailed study, Ezell's emphasis on secondary education allows us to see why many historians cite Russell's creation of a statewide high school system as his single most important contribution. Ezell details how the years of study required for a high school degree, length of school year, curriculum philosophy and requirements, and teacher preparedness all bear trademarks of Albert J. Russell.

Finally is Nita Katherine Pyburn's The History of the Development of a Single System of Education in Florida 1822-1903<sup>10</sup> published in 1954. As simple as it may seem today, something Russell envisioned, an "educational superstructure," a system where eight years of graded schools, leading to four years of high school, leading to four years of college was only a theory and was not widely supported. According to Pyburn, Russell's superstructure was certainly helped by a history of democratic idealism and belief in a widely educated populace, something she argues was indigenous to Florida.<sup>11</sup> Writing from the greatest distance of any Florida history to date, Pyburn recounts the increasing acceptance of the people of Florida of public education, including its fall and rise during and immediately after reconstruction. Legislative history is also well documented. Herself an educator, Pyburn's understanding of the

often subtle interrelationship between all parts of the educational process is noteworthy, and it is from Pyburn that Russell has become known as "Father of the Graded School in Florida."

Besides these five classic historical studies, a 1947 unpublished master's thesis, "A Comparison of Education in the State of Florida with Education in the United States from 1876-1904: Florida in Its National Setting"<sup>12</sup> by Rosa Nelle Hilton, was helpful. A primary reason for the study was to examine whether or not education in the South assumed character distinct from education in other sections of the country. Receiving her data from reports of both State Superintendents of Public Instruction and the United State Commissioner of Education, Hilton limits her study, among other things, to school population growths, education expenditures, teacher education, salaries, dual education, reporting and recording, and uniformity of textbooks.

#### Local History

Besides the five works above, there are several excellent studies of specific schools, colleges and one county that are necessary to this biography. First is Public Schools of Duval County<sup>13</sup> by Lee E. Bigelow completed in 1939. This history was prepared for the Library Projects, Works Progress Administration, Jacksonville. Bigelow's study is important for it details the efforts and contributions of Russell and two other supporters of

education with historical significance. One was Louis I. Fleming, chairman of the local school board and brother of a soon-to-be governor, Francis Phillip Fleming, and brother of C. Seton Fleming, a Civil War hero. The other is Frederick Pasco, a Harvard graduate; principal of Duval High; future principal to the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, and of the East Florida Seminary, and brother to Samuel Pasco, president of the Constitutional Convention of 1885. Since the records of the Duval County School Board have been destroyed three times by fire, Bigelow's study becomes the most authoritative educational record of Duval County from its beginning through 1901.

The History of Early Jacksonville<sup>14</sup> by T. Frederick Davis is the most comprehensive and authoritative history of Jacksonville before the twentieth century. Davis's history provides interesting and helpful background into the general culture, character and daily life in early Jacksonville. Though Russell is not always mentioned by name, he is by implication. When Russell came to Jacksonville in 1860, there were only two thousand citizens. History has told us Russell was likeable and a leader. After the war Russell became "a leading restorer of the waste places," a newspaper editor, a city councilman, a volunteer fire department chief, a superintendent of schools, superintendent of Sunday Schools for a local prominent church, a Grand Master and Grand Secretary of the Masons, and founder of the State-operated Confederate Home, located in Jacksonville. He had

been in Jacksonville only a year before he enlisted in the Confederate Army and on that day was elected the company's second lieutenant. Though not mentioned by name, when Davis wrote...

During 1860, there was no cessation of business. Travel and the mails increased; likewise the telegraph business. Steamers and other vessels came and departed regularly. But with the mutterings of the coming trouble a nervous tension found its way into every occupation. The public mind drifted into political, rather than into commercial channels. Groups of men would collect on the streets and discuss the grave questions of the day. News of the attack on Ft. Sumpter at once suspended all business with the North, and the mills with one exception, closed down. Then the mails ceased coming, and the town began gradually to subside into inactivity, only soon to be drawn into the whirlwind of war.<sup>15</sup>

it is obvious Albert J. Russell was there in the midst of it all.

The City Makers<sup>16</sup> by Richard A. Martin, published in 1972, is a history of Jacksonville's socio-economic and political development, with emphasis on one Jacksonville city father, James Jaqueline Daniel. This history is the most comprehensive and detailed record of Jacksonville between the years 1846-1888. The emphasis on politics, and the socio-economic development involving sons of the Daniel, L'Engle and Fleming families provides invaluable history of Jacksonville, the Civil War and Jacksonville's restoration after the war. Daniel was company commander of Company G, The St. Johns Grays; Russell was its second lieutenant. Russell's contribution to Duval County education was

undoubtedly helped by the importance the Daniel family placed on education; the elder, Daniel James Madison, had been headmaster of the Male Academy at Columbia (across the street from South Carolina College) immediately before coming to settle in Florida. Both Louis I. Fleming and Francis F. L'Engle were School Board chairmen of Duval County during Russell's residency; and Francis Phillip Fleming, Russell's friend, comrade- in-arms became governor of Florida with Russell serving four years as a member of his cabinet. Much more than local color, Martin's book illuminates the foundations of Jacksonville as a city, its business community, churches, school boards and politics.

#### Limited Historical Interests

Much of the reason for Russell's pre-eminence among Florida educators is because of the lasting contributions he made to practically every aspect of the system. When current historical studies, even ones examining history from an extremely limited perspective are written, Russell's contributions are clearly apparent. Chief among these limited historical interests are histories of Black education, higher education, handicapped education, industrial education and teacher education.

The History of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University<sup>17</sup> by Leedell W. Neyland and John W. Riley traces its growth from the founding in 1887 to the date of publication

in 1963. Neyland and Riley's study begins with an overview of black Florida in the early 1880's. Discussed are the Constitutional Convention of 1885, Governor Bloxham, educational history, racial and political climates and, of course, Albert J. Russell. Once again, the history of Duval County education and Superintendent Russell played an important part in things yet to come. One of the most important men in the history of Florida A & M was Thomas Van Renssalaer Gibbs, son of Jonathan Gibbs, Florida's only black State Superintendent of Education. Gibbs began teaching in Duval County when Russell was in the City Council and just before he became County Superintendent. During his years of teaching and Russell's superintendency, Gibbs became a leading figure in the politics of Duval County. The year Russell was appointed State Superintendent, Gibbs was elected to the State Legislature, and ended up a member of the Constitutional Convention and a member of three of its committees including the Committee on Education.

Educating Hand and Mind,<sup>18</sup> a history of vocational education in Florida, is a history of far more. Arguing from a Dewey perspective that, besides intellectual skills, a well-educated person needs manual skills and an understanding of the marketplace, Educating Hand and Mind presents a history of common schools, high schools, higher education, as well as overall educational curriculum and philosophy. Not only does this study, published in 1984,

become important because of its limited interest, but because of its attempt to examine closely the local-state-federal partnership in vocational education. According to its authors, "It seeks to clarify how state and community leaders in Florida responded to leadership from the federal level and how they implemented state and federal policies."<sup>19</sup>

In Florida, higher education began late and on two fronts. The two fronts were state supported and privately supported, usually church sponsored. Both began in the 1800's. This study concentrated on his contributions to State supported higher education even though his contribution to privately funded colleges were considerable. By 1890, the State Agricultural College at Lake City was foremost among Florida's institutions of higher learning. Though receiving renewed dedication and money, the East Florida Seminary and West Florida Seminary were "little more than high schools." Therefore, higher education in Florida is in part best studied through A History of Columbia County Florida<sup>20</sup> by Edward F. Keuchel, since naturally Lake City and Columbia County historians are anxious to tell the complete and full history of the rise and fall of the Agricultural College at Lake City...the forerunner and principal reason for the established success and existence of the University of Florida.

Three Focal Points in the Development of Florida's State System of Higher Education<sup>21</sup> by L. M. Bristol is another reference tracing the history of higher education in

the State. Bristol's study most closely examines "focal points" from a legislative point of view, relying on legal records and Florida Statutes for the bulk of its documentation. The history of "The University of Florida" is also covered as well as its indebtedness to the East Florida Seminary, the West Florida Seminary and the Florida Agricultural College at Lake City.

Issues involving teacher education were studied, in part, by two works. The first was The Florida Chautauqua<sup>22</sup> by Pyburn. Pyburn discusses here the origination of the Florida Chautauqua, an adult educational society modeled after the general plan of the New York Chautauqua, forerunner of Chautauqua offspring throughout various other states generally between 1880 to 1920. The Florida Chautauqua's plan and purpose was to offer "courses of lectures and class instruction; extend the work of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle and to aid in the moral and intellectual culture of the people...". Located at DeFuniak Springs, the Florida Chautauqua played host to the first teacher institute, while DeFuniak Springs housed a normal school for Whites. Russell's work toward establishing state teacher institutes, expanding general educational opportunities, and attitudes towards the Chautauqua are illuminated.

Teacher Institutes, Normal Schools and the evolution of the Florida Education Association are the subjects of the History of the Florida Education Association 1886-87 to 1956-57.<sup>23</sup> Published by the Florida Education Association,



this history is extremely important for it includes the minutes of meetings and periodical summations of the very people often most concerned with the growth, organization and quality of Florida education. Some of the most significant lobbies for mandatory attendance, expansion of school terms, funding and professional publications came from the Florida State Teachers Association. Interesting also are the reasons that credit and title are given to A.J. Russell: the "Father of the Florida Education Association."

#### Primary Sources

Predominant in this section, and for this entire study, is The Life and Labors of Albert J. Russell.<sup>24</sup> Its status, both for its importance to the study and as a primary source, deserves special comment. More Festschrift than biography, and although authored by Mrs. A. J. Russell, 90 percent of the "Life and Labors" are extracts of the reports, letters and speeches of A. J. Russell himself. There is a five-page introduction by Mrs. Russell, which although somewhat personalized by the widow's pen, contains scarcely more biographical information than Sheats' Biennial Report of 1894.

The introduction does contain record of his early days of the Civil War, but the "baptism of fire" suffered by the Second Florida Infantry at Yorktown and the Battle of Williamsburg is a story often told, and often better by

those who participated. No mention of Russell's first wife is given, even though the two were married some 30 years. The introduction then is little more than testimony written by a bereaved widow, scarcely out of her wedding gown, their marriage only about two months old. However poor the accuracy and completeness, following the historical dictum to "kill the widow" would be a mistake. Without The Life and Labors, any historical biography of Russell would be almost impossible. War, fire, time and historical inaccuracies have taken a tremendous toll on the records of his existence. There were no children by either marriage, and there are apparently no forgotten trunks in ancient attic rooms. Jacksonville's Great Fire of 1901 not only leveled the town, it also leveled all of the architectural contributions, including his vicarious and notable contribution, the original Duval High School, Florida's first brick school house, the first high school possessive of a building and a faculty all its own. The Great Fire also destroyed all records and minutes of the Duval County School Board<sup>25</sup> and records and minutes of his Masonic service.<sup>26</sup>

The extracts, letters of tribute, newspaper clippings and photographs included in The Life and Labors were, no doubt, a painstaking labor on Mrs. Russell's part. And it is solely because of her efforts that the vastness of, and the esteem given to, Russell's Life and Labors can be realized. Two years before Russell died, Superintendent Sheats wrote that Russell's "wide affiliations gave him a breadth

and strength of influence possessed perhaps by few men in the State."<sup>27</sup> Mrs. Russell's impending testimony drew letters of tribute from governors, Civil War generals, heroes, leading educators, education societies and the like, none of which would probably exist today were it not for her publication.

Unfortunately, documentation is often missing or inaccurate. Much of the material is comprised of extracts, and organization of the book is loose at best. Attempts were made at both chronological and subject matter organization from time to time, but neither is successfully carried out for long.

The importance of The Life and Labors of Albert J. Russell then is twofold. First are the tributes. Without the book they would probably not exist; and without them, the warmth, respect and love Floridians had for this man would be largely forgotten. Secondly, even though documentation of an extract may be missing, it has been of immeasurable comfort knowing that somewhere it did, or does exist. Hunting for the proverbial needle in the haystack is made infinitely easier when the hunter is fully confident that the needle is indeed there.

The most complete primary source is two bound volumes of correspondence from Russell while he was State Superintendent. These letters are in the State Archives in Tallahassee.<sup>28</sup> The correspondence is actually copies of the originals, but only the outgoing letters exist. The copying

process, predating carbon copies, is known as glassine, whereby an extremely thin sheet of rice paper, slightly dampened, is pressed down over the newly written letter. The porosity of the damp paper allows it to absorb enough of the fresh ink to make an exact duplicate. Many of these letters are over a hundred years old, the ink brown and faded. This, combined with the cursive handwriting and thin paper often make reading difficult. Lengthy readings, made necessary by the archival status, were often tedious and unrewarding. The correspondence is not personal, but routine office management. The volumes supposedly hold seven hundred pages each, and the two volumes are almost entirely written by Russell.

Another primary resource are the eight biennial and annual reports written by Russell.<sup>29</sup> Many of these reports, limited to education from the State Superintendent's office, can still be found in special collections, in the original publication, at several libraries around the state.

Russell was a strong promoter of professional publications. He pressed consistently and demonstratedly for periodicals that would unite the state's teachers, expand their teaching skills, provide for philosophical dialectics and allow discussion of curriculum theory. Microfilmed, interrupted copies of two of the best of these professional periodicals exist. The important but short-lived periodical, The Florida School Journal,<sup>30</sup> is housed at the P. K. Yonge Library in Gainesville. This periodical lasted about

eight years from September 1, 1887, to June 9, 1895. Apparently, the time between publications was never fully determined; sometimes it was issued almost monthly and sometimes roughly quarterly. The National Archives in Washington has all of the known copies of The Florida School Exponent<sup>31</sup> which lasted from 1894 through 1907. Several of these copies are in the P. K. Yonge Library. Both periodicals are important since they can recount the pioneering efforts of Russell and other Florida educators to standardize and to improve both the process and product of Florida education. Much order out of what could easily be called chaos resulted from these first Florida "professional" periodicals.

The last of any organized primary resource will be the Journal of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of 1885.<sup>32</sup> The Journal is a day-by-day accounting of the Constitutional Convention. In it is the official state record that includes staffing of committees, motions, resolutions, letters from the public and "ayes" and "nays" of the voting body. Out of this convention came the decision to elect rather than appoint cabinet officers as well as other officials around the state, and the day-to-day proceedings of the committee on education. Article XII of the new constitution provides the basis for the School Law of 1889 which provides the very foundation for the school system that we have today. The Actual School Law of 1889 itself came out of "The Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida At Its Extra Session, 1889."<sup>33</sup> The

final evolutionary stage is described in this complete wording of "An Act to Establish a Uniform System of Common Schools and County High Schools."

Microfilm copies of The Florida Times-Union<sup>34</sup> will also provide an invaluable resource for this study. The Times Union is much more than the daily hometown newspaper of Albert J. Russell. Politically it stood as one of the most important newspapers in the state. Its editorials, coverage of the Constitutional Convention, politics, speeches by Russell and coverage of Russell's activities provide immensely important documentation for this study. The growth of free public education where none existed, the public education of Negroes where none had been before, and the raising of revenue by taxation were extremely volatile issues. Coupled with the fact that the State Superintendent of Education was from Jacksonville, gave the Times-Union even more reason to follow educational issues closely.

This study was intended to be exhaustive. Every resource imaginable was used. Currently indexed as a result of this study are newspaper articles from around the state; pertinent issues and articles from The Florida Historical Quarterly; all available publications from the State Commissioner of Education's Office such as Narrative Reports of County Superintendents 1892 to 1898-1900,<sup>35</sup> Florida Superintendents of Schools 1845-1974,<sup>36</sup> unpublished masters theses and Doctoral dissertations; and finally, those special library collections involving Russell artifacts. The

Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, of which Russell was a founding father, has its own library. The Library at the Albert J. Russell Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons, in Jacksonville was made available for this research. Since every visible vestige of his being burned in the Great Fire of 1901, the Florida Room at the Haydon Burns Library in Jacksonville becomes the Archives (together with the Archives of the Jacksonville Historical Society at Jacksonville University) of the town in which one of its most prominent citizens lived. Albert J. Russell lived in Jacksonville, partially built and rebuilt it, was a city councilman, school board chairman, and county superintendent of schools, chief of a volunteer fire department, newspaper editor, founder of the Florida Confederate Home, prominent Mason, Oddfellow, Knight of Honor, Superintendent of Sunday School: and was an eloquent and most frequent popular speaker on temperance, politics, and education Russell married in Jacksonville and is buried in Jacksonville. Flames, time, even historical inaccuracies cannot eradicate all contributions Russell made to his town and to his state. The history of its streets, its families, its government, its culture and commerce beginning in 1860 to 1900 and beyond is also his history.

Summary

Collectively there exist several good historical studies of Florida and Florida educational history. Unfortunately, some of these histories were written too near Russell's lifetime and his administration to be able to accurately determine his historical significance, and other histories long after his death have either ignored or miscredited his contributions. Also, war, time and fire have all taken their toll on evidence and records of much of his life. Some information has been destroyed forever; other information can be found only through knowledgeable perserverance. Living ancestors, invaluable to any biographer, do not exist which place even more importance to both primary and secondary sources.



# Notes

1 Roland H. Rerick, Memoirs of Florida 2 vols. (Atlanta, 1902).

2 Edward C. Williamson, Florida Politics in the Gilded Age - 1877-1893 (Gainesville, 1976).

3 William T. Cash, History of the Democratic Party in Florida (Live Oak, 1936).

4 George Gary Bush, History of Education in Florida (Government Printing Office: Washington, 1889).

5 Bi-Ennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction - 1894 (Tallahassee, 1895).

6 Ibid, 30.

7 Thomas E. Cochran, History of Public-School Education in Florida (Lancaster, Pa., 1921).

8 Boyce Fowler Ezell, The Development of Secondary Education in Florida (with special reference to the Public White High School) (Spartanburg, S.C., 1933).

9 Ezell, Secondary Education, 1.

10 Nita K. Pyburn, The History of the Development of a Single System of Education in Florida 1822-1903 (Tallahassee, 1954), 280.

11 Pyburn, Single System, 2.

12 Rosa Nelle Hilton, "A Comparison of Education in the State of Florida with Education in the United States from 1876-1904: Florida in Its National Setting" (FSU, 1947).

13 Lee E. Bigelow, "Public Schoools of Duval County" (Unpublished report, Prepared for the Library Project Works Progress Administration Jacksonville, 1939)

14 Thomas Frederick Davis, History of Early Jacksonville Florida (Jacksonville, 1911).

15 Davis, Early Jacksonville Florida, 148-149.

16 Richard A. Martin, The City Makers (Jacksonville, 1972).

17 Leedell W. Neyland and John W. Riley, The History of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (Gainesville, 1963).

18 Robert G. Stakenas, David B. Mock and Kenneth M. Eaddy, Educating Hand and Mind: A History of Vocational Education in Florida (Lanhan, MD., 1984), 215.

19 Ibid, x.

20 Edward F. Keuchel, A History of Columbia County, Florida (Tallahassee, 1981).

21 L. M. Bristol, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology Emeritus, "Three Focal Points in the Development of Florida's State System of Higher Education." Lectures given at College of Education, University of Florida. (Knoxville, 1952).

22 Nita Katherine Pyburn, The Florida Chautauqua (School of Education: Florida State University) n.p., n.d., p. Copy MS in P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida Library, Gainesville.

23 Florida Education Association History of the Florida Education Association 1886-87 - 1956-57 (Tallahassee, 1958).

24 Mrs. A. J. Russell (ed.), The Life and Labors of Albert J. Russell (Jacksonville, 1897), 368.

25 Bigelow, "Public Schools."

26 Russell, Life and Labors, 341.

27 Bi-ennial Report, 1894, 30.

28 Correspondence of A. J. Russell. Letters on file State Archives, Gray Building: Tallahassee Record Group 402, Series 244, Vol. 5 Oct. 28, 1883 - Oct. 24, 1889 Vol. 6. Nov. 1, 1889 - Feb. 27, 1895.

29 Bi-ennial and Annual Reports of Superintendent Russell are in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History. University of Florida, Gainesville. Scattered copies available in State Library, Tallahassee; Florida Room, Hayden Burns Library, Jacksonville 1883-84, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892, 1893.

30 Florida School Journal The most complete set in existence are on microfilm at P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History. Twenty-three issues from Sept. 1, 1887 - June 9, 1895. The University of Florida Library, Gainesville.

31 Florida School Exponent. Microfilm copies from 1897-1902. P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida Library, Gainesville.

32 Journal of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention (Tallahassee, 1885) Available in several libraries statewide including P. K. Yonge, Gainesville and State Library, Tallahassee.

33 The Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida at Its Extra Session, 1889 (Tallahassee, 1889), 73-84.

34 Microfilm copies of the complete file of Florida Times-Union are on file in the Hayden Burns Library, Jacksonville.

35 Narrative Reports of County Superintendents 1892-94 to 1898-1900. Research Report-21. Division of Research. Commissioner of Education Office. MIS, 275 (Tallahassee), 181.

36 Florida Superintendent of Schools 1845-1983. Statistical Report. Florida Department of Education. MIS Series 84-10. (Tallahassee, 1983), 47.

## CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

### Research Procedures

Research on the life of Albert J. Russell involves an exhaustive study of literature involving Florida State history; local history of Duval County and Jacksonville, Florida, politics and the Democratic party; and Florida educational history. Some of these sources mention and/or discuss Russell, while others discuss only the events that shaped the history and the future of Florida and its educational system. Primary sources, newspapers, especially the Florida Times-Union and state documents involving legislation and education contributed to the factual reports of his life and contributions. Locations, dates and responsibilities were furnished through the Government Services Administration, books of record such as Soldiers of Florida,<sup>1</sup> Jacksonville City Directory,<sup>2</sup> and the Fraternal Record.<sup>3</sup>

Besides the specific research questions listed in Chapter I, four questions guided the methodology of this research. Where and how did Albert J. Russell receive the background and motivation for his educational contributions to Florida; what were the contributions made to Florida education specifically attributable to Russell; what were the

events and social relations that made possible the vastness of his contributions to Florida education; and how do the last years of his life serve to prove his contributions to Florida education were more a part of his personal philosophy, convictions and substance than politics or administrative expediency?

No personal interviews involving Russell's family were involved since he had no children and many of the events in question happened over 100 years ago. Interviews, however, involving several sessions, were conducted with many of Jacksonville's elderly citizens associated with the historical society, and archivists with the FEA-United, Florida Chautauqua, Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, and local Civil War historians in order to determine as best and as historically accurate as possible how "things were back then." In other words, many prominent and/or official Masonic, Civil War, educational and local historians were personally involved in this research.

Notes

1     Soldiers of Florida in the Seminole Indian -  
Civil and Spanish-American Wars (Live Oak, 1903).

2     Vance's Jacksonville City Directory Volume 1  
(Jacksonville, 1895), 240.

3     J. W. White, Editor, The Fraternal Record, Vol.  
29 (Jacksonville, 1921).

## CHAPTER FOUR BIOGRAPHY AND CIVIL WAR

To become known as Albert J. Russell the Floridian, he had to be born twice, and both times in his native state of Virginia. His first birth was January 15, 1829, in Petersburg; his second came thirty-two years later in the Baptism of Fire received by the 2nd Florida Infantry at the Battle of Williamsburg, May 5, 1862. And yet the scarcity of details about the first half of his life gives little clue as to the stature and importance he would come to have in his adopted state. In retrospect, however, the foundations for his statesmanship, ideals for a meritocratic society, and his unofficial title as "Florida's Silver-Tongued Orator" seem to have been a result of the complementary influences of his family and his education. So little is known however, that filling in the many missing pieces requires conjecture. This can be done with some degree of accuracy, because, while by no means simple, Albert J. Russell was not a complex man. Looking at his whole life reveals no inconsistencies, no irrationalities, no periods of dark surrealism or impassioned vendettas. In spite of his relatively long life, his incredible list of accomplishments and the diversities of his worlds, Major Russell lived simply, in the style of accomplished,

self-actualized person. He was warrior yet educator, businessman yet statesman, Floridian yet universalist.

It could be said that young Albert was born into a good family, by all appearances conventional and of modest to comfortable means. Albert was named in part after his grandfather Jonathan on his mother's side, he being the first born to parents William Hathaway Russell and Sarah Ann Iseman.<sup>1</sup> His brother William was named for his father. His mother's family prided themselves on oratorical skills, and certainly Albert's own interests in public speaking were cultivated and appreciated. One of his early delights was to accompany his family to Petersburg parks where amongst the parading local militia, they would listen to speeches, especially the annual reading of the Declaration of Independence. Even after his education and apprenticeship, Russell remained active in a debating club until he left Philadelphia for the warmer climate of Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>2</sup> Once, when asked why he did not engage himself in professional speaking circuits, Russell replied that "The clang of silver dulls the tongue of oratory." By all accounts Russell spoke extemporaneously, without notes and with only a quick supplication to God to guide him.<sup>3</sup> Many friends and associates cautioned that his unwritten speeches would be lost in the air that carried them, and that his words, his themes, not to mention his power and eloquence, would be unaccounted for in history. Evidently it was caution unheeded, for with the exception of journalists'



notes, only a couple of his speeches were recorded, and then only fragments. But as to his speaking abilities, one Times-Union reporter wrote, "Cold type cannot invest it with the fire and fervor of the speaker";<sup>4</sup> while the Tampa Guardian once reported that its "Cold type cannot bring to our readers the impassioned presence or the magnetic voice of the speaker."<sup>5</sup> Russell spoke often and became a familiar speaker throughout the state on a wide range of topics championing frontier Florida, the Democratic party, Masonry, education, temperance, Cuban independence and reparation between the North and the South in the years following the Civil War. He was also a favorite speaker for his church.

It is likely that young Albert excelled in academic and intellectual pursuits. These interests, coupled with his formal schooling at Anderson Seminary, established not only his love for learning but his belief in the role of education toward producing and maintaining a true democratic society. Little did David Anderson, founder of the seminary, know that the seeds he planted in his free school in Petersburg would develop and take root in Florida, eventually spreading throughout the entire state. Anderson Seminary was Petersburg's first experiment with free education. According to Anderson's will, probated in 1812, a little more than \$10,000 was set aside for the use of the Seminary to educate the poor white children whose parents were unable to educate them.<sup>6</sup>

Russell's family's economic health no doubt suffered as a result of his father's death in 1840 when Albert was only eleven years old. "My father," he later wrote, "called me to his bedside about an hour before he died and told me he would leave us in a little while, that I was a good boy and young as I was, he felt he could leave my mother in my charge. 'Do for her,' he said, 'as you have seen me do, my son'."7

While there are no existing records of student rolls or performance, Albert's first experience with academics must have been pleasant ones. After his death, a classmate, who was also a son of one of the seminary's principals and who went off to become a U.S. Consul in Egypt, A.M. Kieley wrote, "I recall Albert as exhibiting in school, as throughout his life, that earnest fidelity to the work at hand, which was always a marked characteristic of his career."8

As a school, Anderson Seminary survived far longer than did most schools, even conventional ones. This was helped in part by Petersburg's decision to augment Anderson's trust with proceeds of the Literary Fund of Virginia. Opening in 1821, the school originally organized itself around the Lancastrian system whereby the teacher's brightest students would become monitors for ten other students. Once organized, one teacher could "teach" hundreds of students. The Lancastrian plan, however, was discontinued after a few years. By 1830 over 400 students had been enrolled in the

seminary. However poor its wards, the school seems to have provided as good as, if not the best, education available in Petersburg.<sup>9</sup> Many of the school's principals were distinguished scholars and included among their ranks Charles Campbell, "the leading historian of Virginia and a fine classical scholar." For the most part, the curriculum was divided into a three-year program of study. Instruction included reading, writing, and the common rules of arithmetic. After remaining in operation for well over half a century, it was incorporated into the public school system in 1868.<sup>10</sup>

However successful Anderson Seminary, and however well supported, it remained tainted and controversial due to its mission. Private references frequently referred to it as "the poor school" or the "charity school." And as to the Literary Fund which helped support the school, a writer for the Petersburg Intelligencer warned that education was best left to individual enterprise and that public education was "a powerful engine to destroy the freedom of opinion, the purity of republicanism and the advancement of a liberal system of education."<sup>11</sup>

Approximately three and a half decades later, when Russell would become Chairman of the Duval County School Board, then county superintendent, then ultimately State Superintendent of Public Instruction, public opinion continued to be opposed to free, public instruction. In the face of reconstruction and the aftermath of Civil War,

public education for Negroes was yet even more controversial and volatile an issue. Russell accurately recognized that in order to have a true statewide system of good public education, attitudes toward free schools, especially toward the populace which supposedly paid little or no taxes, had to be changed. One of Superintendent Russell's greatest accomplishments, then, was in popularizing the unpopular. Later, in chapters dealing with his county and state superintendency, the formidability of this task will be better realized.

Architecturally Anderson Seminary was not especially grand or innovative; rather it fit the style of the day. It was a pleasant enough building, being two stories in height with plenty of glass windows. It had a gabled roof with two Ionic columns in the single-storied porch entrance. Around the school ran a wrought-iron fence, although it is not certain such extravagance existed in Albert's day. Atop the front of the school, a four cornered, columned bell tower stood with white, louvered walls. Compared to most school houses Superintendent Russell would inherit, Anderson Seminary was far advanced for its time. Little wonder one of Russell's priorities and sources of great pride was the modernization and physical improvements made to new and existing school houses. The construction of the first brick school house in Florida was built under the direction of Russell when he was but a county superintendent in Jacksonville. Some twenty years later, in his report to the

governor in 1890, Russell said: "It is a matter of deep interest and a cause for congratulation to witness the passing away of the crude old-time school house, and taking their places, the new and more comfortable, better ventilated, lighted and pleasant school houses."<sup>12</sup>

Three years after his father's death, his mother also passed away. It was an especially grievous time for all the Russell children. Instead of a mother, the children had a guardian responsible for their welfare. After his mother's death, the bodies of his father and grandparents were placed alongside hers in Petersburg's Old Blandford Cemetery, the Parish having been established in 1735. It was an ironically prophetic move, for several years after his own death, Russell's corpse was moved to where it rests today, in Jacksonville's Old City Cemetery.<sup>13</sup>

When he finished Anderson Seminary, Russell was apprenticed by his guardian to a Mr. Ambler of Richmond.<sup>14</sup> There he, along with his brother William, studied architecture and building. After his apprenticeship, he went along with William to Philadelphia where he remained until 1852 when both brothers relocated to Charleston, South Carolina. It was in Charleston that Russell became acquainted and involved with Odd Fellowship and Masonry, popular fraternal organizations of the day. His political success had its first roots here. He was admitted to Jefferson Lodge No. 4, I.O.O.F. in 1854. He was elected Secretary in June, 1855, Vice-grand in December and Noble

Grand the following June. By 1857 he was admitted to the Grand Lodge and at the same time appointed Grand Guardian of the Grand Lodge.<sup>15</sup> Besides fraternal organizations, architecture and building, young Russell may have worked a great deal with carpentry and ship building, both popular vocations in two active port cities. Whether Albert was drawn to ship carpentry by love of ships or the demand created by the "Tri-States Port of Philadelphia" is unknown. Nevertheless, Philadelphia remains the largest freshwater port in the world. And certainly the demand was equally strong in the busy ports of Charleston where even today ship building remains a major industry of the city.

On two occasions at least, Russell emphasized his ship building and carpentry skills over architecture. Soon after locating in Jacksonville, with William remaining in Charleston, Russell took out an ad in The St. John's Mirror, "A.J. Russell & Co." labeling himself as a cabinet maker, carpenter, furniture refinisher with jobbing in carpentry and ship joining.<sup>16</sup> Later, during the Civil War, in 1863 he wrote to the Confederate Adjutant General's office requesting an assignment to the Naval Construction department as a pattern maker. "I have for years," he said, "been accustomed to this kind of work."<sup>17</sup>

But for eight years Russell remained with his brother in Charleston, until 1859, when for some reason he again relocated, this time to Florida. First he went to Lake City, at a time reputed by many to be the most prosperous

and opportunity-filled urban city in Florida. It was one of the first Florida cities to have electricity, and the town laid wide claim to the healthful living conditions, especially to the curative powers of the Florida climate.<sup>18</sup> Within a year Russell left Lake City for Jacksonville, the city that was to become his home where he would become one of its most prominent citizens.

Only speculation can account for Russell's move to Florida and Jacksonville. If he moved to Charleston to escape the harsh winters of Philadelphia, it is possible he moved to Florida, as did thousands, for even better living conditions. There exists no record of his physical condition, and while he was not in appearance large and robust, there is no reason to suspect he was ever sickly or especially desirous of the healthful benefits of Florida's climate. Possibly it was the boom town reputation of Lake City that drew him there, just as it was possible that the busy port and boom town atmosphere of Jacksonville caused him to move there. At the very least Jacksonville certainly presented opportunities for the young and adventurous.

In the years 1850 to 1860, Jacksonville had doubled in population with the 1860 census reporting 2,000 citizens.<sup>19</sup> Slaves, itinerant workers and temporary inhabitants on their way to neighboring communities pushed the population closer to 4,000. Over half the living spaces in Jacksonville then and for several decades after were boarding houses and hotels.<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of the economic opportunities and the excitement of a new home, the impending conflict between the North and South unquestionably became the dominant concern of the year. The hustle and bustle of Jacksonville life, combined with the uncertainty that comes with war, could have been the reasons for Russell's advertisement as carpenter and ship joiner rather than architect and builder. Carpentry would ensure a quicker cash flow, and for the extra-conscientious in the event of war, it would be easier to leave a crew of ship joiners than leave a house in the middle of a blue print or construction.

#### The Civil War

According to T. Frederick Davis, one of Jacksonville's early historians, the town was soon swept up in forces larger than itself or even the state.

During 1860 there was no cessation of business. Travel and the mails increased; likewise the telegraph business. Steamers and other vessels came and departed regularly. But with the mutterings of the coming trouble a nervous tension found its way into every occupation. The public mind drifted into political rather than into commercial channels. Groups of men would collect on streets and discuss the grave questions of the day. News of the attack on Fort Sumter at once suspended all business with the North, and the mills with one exception, closed down. Then the mails ceased coming, and the town began gradually to subside into inactivity, only soon to be drawn into the whirlpool of war.<sup>21</sup>



On January 10, 1861, Florida passed the Ordinance of Secession and became the third Southern state to join the Confederacy.<sup>22</sup> Jacksonville maintained a strong contingent of Northern sympathizers in spite of continual harassment and public demonstrations to the contrary. Within a year, however, Jacksonville was to be occupied by the Union army and would remain virtually under control of federal troops for the duration.<sup>23</sup>

One biographical sketch states that Russell "participated in the discussions on Secession" as he surely did.<sup>24</sup> Yet it would be hard to imagine he was a firebrand, soap box railer at Yankees. Russell owned no slaves, never appears to have been consumed with material desires and spoke often and eloquently after the conflict in attempts to heal wounds of the nation's bloodiest war. Had he been a passionate rebel, he could have enlisted in Florida's first company of Confederate troops, the Jacksonville Light Infantry commanded by Captain Holmes Steele, which was activated almost immediately upon Secession. Instead, Russell joined the company of J.J. Daniel, which became the St. Johns Grays, Company G, of the famous 2nd Florida Infantry.<sup>25</sup>

Another Jacksonville historian, Lee E. Bigelow, suggests men joined branches of, or regiments of commanders they already knew rather than enlist with someone they did not.<sup>26</sup> Whether it was happenstance or intentional, joining the St. Johns Grays was easily the most fortuitous move made

by Russell, for at war's end he would be almost catapulted into the limelight of some of Florida's leading shapers and statesmen. J.J. Daniel was a member of one of Jacksonville's leading families; he and Louis I. Fleming owned Jacksonville's most prestigious and successful law practice after the war, and Daniel would come to head one of the most powerful newspapers in the state, the Florida Times-Union. Also represented in the St. Johns Grays was C. Seton Fleming, brother to Francis Phillip Fleming, future governor of Florida on whose cabinet Russell would serve, and two of the L'Engle boys, John and Edward, also among the top three Jacksonville families, the Daniels, Flemings, and L'Engles.<sup>27</sup>

Russell and Daniel were to remain close together until August, 1863 when Russell left for assignment with the Confederate Navy, complete with Captain Daniel's blessing and letter of recommendation.<sup>28</sup>

The St. Johns Grays organized themselves into a company of 108 officers and men on May 9, 1861. On that day they elected Russell 2nd Lieutenant.<sup>29</sup> During the weeks that followed, The Grays drilled at the regiment camp site at LaVilla, a Jacksonville suburb. On July 13 the Grays were mustered into regular Confederate service. With much pomp and circumstance all ten Florida companies paraded together under new, homemade flags to the approval of hundreds of townspeople and relatives. Colonel George T. Ward, regimental commander from Leon County, shocked everyone with

the news that within two days the regiment would leave for war. Proudly he informed the men and crowd that the 2nd Florida was to be the first Florida regiment to serve in the field.<sup>30</sup> When the company's flag was presented to them, 2nd Lieutenant Russell received it "with fitting words." Lt. Russell frequently acted as the adjutant of the regiment.<sup>31</sup>

Two days later the 2nd Florida boarded the train for the men's first leg on their trip to Virginia. Thousands waved farewell. According to one authority:

They were watched, as they departed, with strange exaltation of soul, and the tears of affection were mingled with the proud anticipation of martial hymns. Flowers were showered upon them by fair hands at many places on the way; banners waved, and the cheers of ardent patriotism helped assuage the pain of the recent farewell to home and kindred.<sup>32</sup>

For the next two months the regiment stayed in the Camp of Instruction of Virginia just outside Richmond, the Confederate capital. Early in September the regiment was assigned to General Magruder's command in the field near Yorktown, between the York and James Rivers. In December, Lt. Russell took a 15 day leave for Christmas, probably to visit his brother William in Charleston.<sup>33</sup> For the remainder of the winter the troops continued their encampment near Yorktown. In the spring, however, Russell and his regiment were exploded into the heat of war. In a period of only weeks, the regiment was in the battles of Yorktown, Parmatories Farm, Williamsburg and the retreat to Chickahominy.

The Union commander, Major General George B. McClellan, had earlier conferred with Lincoln to strike a decapitating blow to Richmond from the sea. It was to be a major military effort involving the Navy, infantry and massive artillery including 300 cannon, mostly 12-pound Parrots, 32-pound howitzers, Rodman guns and several batteries from the fleet.<sup>34</sup> In early April McClellan and 130,000 men were less than 60 miles from Richmond. Preparations for the destruction of Yorktown, a nearby Rebel stronghold near Richmond, lasted a whole month. Then, the night before the massive bombardment of Yorktown was to begin, the Confederates pulled out for Richmond. Spring rains had so muddied the roads and flooded streams that movement was extremely difficult. McClellan went in pursuit of the retreating army, both of whom were bogging down in nearly impassible roads still between the swollen York and James Rivers.

On May 4 General Hooker, along with the Union Cavalry, came upon a strong Rebel earthwork between the junction of two muddied roads, with a chain of redoubts obstructing his advance. The defenses of the earthenworks had been engineered largely by Russell, especially the mounting and placement of the heavy guns.<sup>35</sup> The Confederate leader, General Joseph E. Johnston, decided to make a stand there and personally led a brigade with two four-gun batteries into "Fort Magruder" only seconds ahead of Hooker's frontal attack.<sup>36</sup> The 2nd Florida had already been ordered to

center line. The Regimental Commander Colonel George T. Ward, the man who led the St. Johns Grays out of Jacksonville, had been plagued by premonitions of death early in the war. In the confusion of straining horses, mud and impending battle, he spotted Lt. Russell and said, "My presentiment is more forcefully upon me now."<sup>37</sup> It was a quote from Sir Walter Scott's "Lady of the Lake." The band played "The Campbells are Coming." In an hour Ward would be dead. He was killed with a shot to the heart while leading an advance to within "twenty or thirty steps" of the federal line. The Florida men, emotionally charged at the sight of Ward's dead body in enemy-held land, rescued his corpse in a dramatic rush under heavy fire. C. Seton Fleming was seriously wounded and left for dead.<sup>38</sup> Every company of the 2nd Florida had men killed or wounded. The Federals, however, were held in check. Days later, a little over a year after enlistment, the regiment settled for its scheduled reorganization. Russell was elected 1st Lieutenant of Company A during the retreat to Chickahominy. On May 11, due to exhaustion, Company Commander Daniel was ordered to a hospital where he remained until October. On May 13, Russell received \$189.26 in back pay.<sup>39</sup> The baptism of fire was over.

After reorganization on July 17, 1862, Russell was appointed Drill Master and assigned to the Florida Camp of Instruction in Tallahassee. He would serve here and in the subsidiary camp in Gainesville until approximately August of

the following year. On November 20, 1862, Lt. Russell wrote the Adjutant General's office on what must have been a typical report from a camp of instruction. He reported 132 conscripts for the date. Six of these were discharged and two deserted, leaving a balance of 124 men in camp. He signed it "1st Lt. Comdg."<sup>40</sup> No other evidence of camp life can be found. On June 30, 1863, he wrote to Richmond requesting reassignment to the Naval Construction Department. The letter was terse and to the point.

Camp of Instruction  
Florida  
Gainesville June 30th 1863

Gen. S Cooper  
Adj. Gn. C.S.A.  
Richmond Va.

Genl. I would respectfully apply through you to the Sec. of War to be transferred to the Naval Construction department as a Pattern maker.

I have for several years been accustomed to this kind of work and feel sure that I can be of much more use to the government in this war than in my present service.

I have the honour to remain  
Very respectfully  
Your obdt sert  
Albert J. Russell  
1st Liet & Drill Master

P.A.C.S<sup>41</sup>

The Navy Department was having an even worse time of the war than the Army. Most Southerners had grown complacent about the Navy due to its early victories in the

war and the fact that few ever considered the importance of the war at sea. The situation, however, became so bad that Richmond passed a law on May 1, 1863, requiring the transfer from the Army of all trained seamen to the Navy. It was a law almost disregarded, but the Navy did continue to issue several desperate calls for men.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the Navy was especially desperate for new ships. Captain Daniel's letter of recommendation stated that Russell had "superior qualifications as a master mechanic and ship builder," and that he could be "of much greater service to the country in this way." On July 18, 1863, in one of the last documented acts of Russell's participation in the war, Stephen Mallory, Secretary of the Navy wrote James Seddon, Secretary of War, approving and requesting Russell's transfer to the Navy. Russell was ordered to report to Chief Engineer J.H. Warner, Commander of the Confederate States Naval Iron Works in Columbus, Georgia.<sup>43</sup>

From this point on, only a few published accounts of Russell's war activities can be found. One was from an 1885 Jacksonville biographical sketch. Another was a Times-Union obituary and the last, an introduction to The Life and Labors written by his widow. What follows is conjecture, but could be of such importance to Russell's achievements after the war that it requires inclusion. Historical accuracy would suffer only in the details since Russell was undoubtedly in Columbus, and since published reports differ only in one respect.

A good number of pattern makers worked at the Naval Iron works under Chief Engineer Warner including three companies of civilians. Besides Naval construction, these men were drilled as part of the local defense militia. Russell's qualifications as field combat veteran, officer, drill master and pattern maker likely put him in a position of authority. The 1885 biographical sketch reports that he:

organized the operatives in the various government works of the Confederacy: was called out during the siege of Atlanta, participated in the retreat across Georgia in front of Sherman's army; and was at the siege of Savannah, and subsequently at the surrender at Columbus, where he was paroled.<sup>44</sup>

Local Columbus historians report that the Columbus militia/defense workers were activated in November of 1864 to contest Sherman's "March to the Sea" and participated in the siege of Savannah in December. Colonel Leon Von Zinken, listed in Russell's obituary as "General Von Zeken" under whom he served, was post commander.<sup>45</sup> It is likely Von Zinken was killed in the Battle of Columbus, April 1865. Most of the post's militia men were involved in this battle and this, of course, would put newly promoted Major Russell at Columbus rather than Durham Station as Mrs. Russell stated. She makes a most curious statement after reporting, "He was with General Joseph E. Johnston at the surrender, near Durham Station, not far from Raleigh N.C." It is then that she wrote, "He stood under an apple tree when he was paroled."<sup>46</sup> This hardly seems like a line she would make up out of the blue, yet the incident does seem like one to be



noted and remembered by Russell. Columbus is not noted for its apple trees while Durham, North Carolina, has them in profusion.

Speculation aside, Russell's latter war service did much to prepare him for his return to Jacksonville and civic responsibilities. First, it aligned him with the fighting Confederate veterans of Jacksonville. Secondly, he had been repeatedly put into positions of authority, first as officer, and frequently as adjutant of the 2nd Florida. Then he became commander of the Camp of Instruction in Gainesville. Organizing "the operatives in the various government works of the Confederacy," however vague and pretentious, does suggest, minimally, several things. More and more Major Russell was a leader, whose authority grew rapidly in the last six months of the war. Jointly working with civilian militia defenses and with the regular military, Major Russell would be given firsthand experience with civilian and military bureaucracy. Also, his experiences as officer and commander of the civil defenses in Columbus enabled him to see the necessary interactions between the many who resided there. Finally, the last-flung fury at the enemy put Russell in charge of a "battalion of troops" with the rank of Major, infinitely more prestigious than Lieutenant, whereby he would be recognized and referred to throughout the state as "Major Russell" for the rest of his life.

It has to be somewhat of a mystery why Russell even returned to Jacksonville after the war. He had moved to Jacksonville only a short time before the war started and his brother was in Charleston, prospering as a successful architect. He was married to a Jacksonville woman, but other than that he had no roots there. They had no children, and it is doubtful Julia remained in Jacksonville throughout the war. Julia lived with her children and her widowed mother in her mother's house, but it was destroyed by the war.<sup>47</sup> Jacksonville had been occupied several times by Federal troops and at some length; these same forces had burned the town each time before leaving. Nothing, it seemed, of Russell's Jacksonville was left. To make matters worse, the town was under martial law. According to Brigadier General I. Vogdes, it was "the only law recognized as existing within the limits of this command."<sup>48</sup> On May 16, 1865, a Confederate officer wrote from Madison referring to Jacksonville, "It is said the place is filled with Yankees--it will be a worse Yankee hole than ever. I would not live there for anything."<sup>49</sup>

# Notes

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3 Mrs. A.J. Russell (ed.), The Life and Labors of Albert J. Russell (Jacksonville, 1897), 156, 134, 193, 264-65.

4 Florida Times-Union, August 5, 1884.

5 Tampa Guardian, February 17, 1887.

6 James G. Scott and Edward A. Wyatt IV, Petersburg's Story: A History (Richmond, 1960), 118.

7 Russell, Life and Labors, 12.

8 Ibid, 14.

9 William D. Henderson, Gilded Age City: Politics, Life, Labor in Petersburg, Virginia 1874-1889 (Washington, D.C. 1980), 133.

10 Scott and Wyatt, Petersburg's Story, 119.

11 Petersburg Intelligencer, August 20, 1818.

12 Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction State of Florida, 1890 (Tallahassee, 1891), 12.

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14 Biographical File, State Library of Florida; Florida Collection, Biography: Albert Jonathon Russell; The Florida Dispatch, Farmer and Florida Fruit Grower. October 3, 1889.

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- 26 Lee E. Bigelow, History of Jacksonville, Florida  
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- 27 Martin, City Makers, 35.
- 28 Capt. J.J. Daniel Letters on File. Military  
Services Branch. National Archives.
- 28 Russell, Life and Labors, 15.
- 29 Soldiers of Florida, 89.
- 30 Martin, City Makers, 34.
- 31 Davis, History of Jacksonville, 157.
- 32 National Archives. Pay Voucher indicates leave of  
absence for 15 days beginning December 17, 1861. Mrs.  
Russell reported Russell visited his brother in Charleston,  
Life and Labors, 15.
- 33 Curt Johnson and Mark McLaughlin, Civil War  
Battles (New York, 1977), 53.

34 Francis Phillip Fleming. Incident reported in his tribute to Russell in Russell, Life and Labors, 280.

35 Marshall Andrews, "Battle of Williamsburg," Battles of the Civil War 1861-1865 (Birmingham, 1960), 28.

36 Russell, Life and Labors, 276.

37 John P. Ingle, "Soldiering with the Second Florida Regiment." Florida Historical Quarterly. LIX (January 1981), 338.

38 Pay Voucher for Lt. Albert J. Russell. Military Services Division, May 13, 1862. National Archives.

39 Russell to General S. Cooper, Adj. Gen. CSA March 20, 1862. Microfilm M331. American Genealogical Lending Library.

40 Russell to General Cooper, June 30, 1862.

41 Thomas J. Scharf History of the Confederate States Navy (New York, 1887), 41.

42 Stephen A. Mallory, Secretary of the Confederate Navy to James A. Seddon, Secretary of War. Services Division, National Archives.

43 James Esgate, Jacksonville, The Metropolis of Florida (Boston, 1885), 139.

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45 Russell, Life and Labors, 15.

46 Archibald Books. Deedbook M. pp. 664-65. Commonwealth Land Title. Martin Bldg. Suite 200, Jacksonville. Lot 1, Block 97 was referred to as Russell's mother-in-law's residence. By October 24, 1865, it was referred to as a "Lot" only.

47 Florida A Hundred Years Ago, June, 1865.

48 Florida A Hundred Years Ago, May 16, 1865.

CHAPTER FIVE  
RECONSTRUCTION JACKSONVILLE AND DUVAL SUPERINTENDENCY

Florida was not very distinct from the rest of the South during Reconstruction, and yet historians could argue that Florida was the most Southern of all Southern states. A greater percentage of its men went off to war than that of any other state in the Confederacy.<sup>1</sup> Its supplies to the Confederate government were also substantial. Toward the end of the war Florida was a leader in furnishing cattle, hogs, dried fish, sugar and salt.<sup>2</sup> Many think the government of Florida cooperated more closely with the Confederate government than that of any other Southern state.<sup>3</sup> So committed to the Confederacy was its Governor, John Milton, that shortly after delivering his eulogy to Florida and the Confederacy in the spring of 1865, he put a shotgun to his head and blew out his brains.<sup>4</sup>

However Confederate, when the loyalists, occupational forces and carpetbaggers combined numbers, Florida was a state strongly divided. As a consequence, political, social and economic strife were to dominate for the next fifteen or so years during Reconstruction.

Locally, Jacksonville had been devastated by the war. It had been burned four times by first occupying, then departing Federal troops.<sup>5</sup> At the end, it was again occupied by Federal forces, mostly black soldiers who

contributed greatly to urban tensions.<sup>6</sup> Under martial law, Jacksonville was a far different community than when the 2nd Florida Infantry left for war in 1861 to the adoring and cheering crowds.

In his book on the failure of self-reconstruction in the South, Dan Carter makes two conclusions that could be largely responsible for Major Russell's successes as statesman and educator. According to Carter, the men who tried to bring the South back into the Union in 1865 and 1866 were "racists... fanatically opposed to...black political participation and willing to do almost anything to thwart federal involvement in...the domestic affairs of the Southern States." Carter feels, however, that most historians have overlooked the "significant role of a substantial number of postwar Southerners who endorsed tax and credit policies that would promote industrial as well as agricultural development."<sup>7</sup> Certainly the latter was Russell's category. By the time Major Russell left the State Superintendent's office, he had done much to heal the wounds of war between Northern and Southern forces; he supported industrial arts and Black education tremendously; he introduced industrial arts and vocational education to the classic curriculum; and he advanced Florida's diversification of agriculture through research in institutions of higher education.

But it was more than vision that accounted for Russell's success as a postwar Floridian. According to

Harrison Reed, ex-governor of Florida, Russell did not "sulk in his tent" but earnestly set out "achieving a livelihood and competence for himself and family."<sup>8</sup> Russell's affiliation with the "Grand Cause" and the 2nd Florida not only established his credentials, it provided him with an increasing network of inner-circle power on both local and statewide political scenes. Florida was so Confederate, in fact, that it waited until 1901 to elect a governor who had not participated in the Confederacy. And non-participation could not be blamed on William Jennings since he was only 37 years old when elected, and only one year old when the war ended.

Besides the charred ruins, besides martial law enforced by Yankee soldiers, racial tensions, property loss, carpet baggers, disrupted economy and all the other problems resulting from the war, there were other more positive aspects of postwar Jacksonville. Tourists and visitors continued to fill all the hotel rooms and boarding homes.<sup>9</sup> Businesses began to flourish. Food and housing remained in critical shortage however. Many returning Southerners as did Major Russell found their homes destroyed or occupied by Federal troops. By fall, Jacksonville was well into a period of recovery. The town was rebuilding and trade lines were becoming more filled and more regular in shipments, and many new buildings were under construction by local firms.

The Florida Union reported:

The music of the fife and drum has  
given place to the more cheerful



sound of the carpenter's hammer and saw, which are being vigorously plied...Altogether we think that the prospect is very encouraging and that by another spring few traces will be left of the disastrous and destructive fires, and the other ravages of war, that have driven the people from their homes and laid in ruins the fairest portion of what has been and what at no distant day will be again the fairest city in the South.<sup>10</sup>

It can only be assumed the hammer and pen of A.J. Russell, architect, was as vigorously plied as anyone's. Ex-governor Reed described Russell as "the leading contractor in restoring the waste places and reconstructing the city of Jacksonville after the war."<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the fire of 1891, and then the Great Fire of 1901 which virtually leveled the entire city, destroyed not only Russell's buildings but almost all of the city's records as well.<sup>12</sup> Except that he was quite busy as an architect and builder, only one incident can be documented about Russell's activities between 1865 and 1870. Obviously made destitute by the events of the war, Russell's mother-in-law gave him power of attorney to sell the lot of her former residence on the west end of Bay Street on October 24, 1865. Probably unable to wait longer for a buyer, Russell secured a loan of three hundred dollars on the property approximately five months later.<sup>13</sup>

Beginning in 1870, however, Russell virtually exploded into political and social prominence. In 1870 the Mechanic's Steam Fire Engine Company was chartered.

According to all local historians, the establishment of an organized volunteer fire department provided Jacksonville with its most important social and political organization. Brown's The Book of Jacksonville: A History claims "At one time the Mayor, Chief of Police, Marshall, and several members of the City Council held membership in the Mechanic's and owed their official positions to that fact."<sup>14</sup> Four other fire fighting companies were organized. Some companies restricted their membership to Jacksonville's leading, most eminent and socially prominent citizens.<sup>15</sup> In March of 1877, seven years after the first fire fighting company was chartered, The Florida Union had cause to editorialize against the fire fighters' political power.<sup>16</sup> But as to those important founding days, W.C. West, Jacksonville City Recorder, wrote:

Being a man born to lead . . . Major Russell was chosen as first Chief of the Department...as evidence of Major Russell's popularity, and the esteem in which he was held by his comrades, the Mechanics Steam Fire Engine Company on November 6, 1871, presented him with a silver mounted walking cane, and in December following, the Mechanic's expressed its appreciation of his efforts by presenting to him a silver cup, as a token of the regard and esteem in which he was held.<sup>17</sup>

On March 25, 1871, Major Russell released to the newspaper his first published public statement as an elected official. It came from the office of Chief of the Fire Department and was addressed:

Firemen of Jacksonville,  
Your Chief cannot refrain from  
congratulating as well as complimenting

you upon the heroic and effective manner in which you discharged your duties last night at the burning of Harley & Co.'s Mill. You have established beyond the shadow of a doubt your heroism and effectiveness as a Fire Department, and your City should be proud of you.

Albert J. Russell, Chief.<sup>18</sup>

In 1873, Russell was elected Grand Master of the Masons.<sup>19</sup> This meant that he was the presiding officer for all of Florida in certainly one of the most important political organizations in the State. Also noteworthy is that Russell succeeded Samuel Pasco who had been Grand Master for 1870-71-72.<sup>20</sup> Pasco, another Confederate veteran, would become President of the Constitutional Convention of 1885.<sup>21</sup> His brother Frederick was an officer in the Grand Lodge and later would work closely with Russell as interim Duval County Superintendent, teacher, and principal of Duval High School.

In April that following year, Major Russell was elected to the City Council by a "handsome majority." President of the City Council was Louis I. Fleming, another man who would become an important ally of Russell's during the next several years. In 1877, Russell and Fleming would make Florida educational history. On May 18, at the next meeting of the City Council, Alderman Russell was elected President pro-tem. Russell was then selected by the Council to address the member of the State Medical Committee who would be visiting Jacksonville, and to prepare an address on the question of bonding the city, to be delivered at a public meeting in the city park.<sup>22</sup>

In 1874 and again in 1875 Russell was reelected Grand Master of the Masons. Clearly, Major Russell had become established as a popular political leader at both the local and state levels.

Increasingly, his orational skills were becoming a dynamic part of the community leader's persona. In February, 1877, at the State Fair which was held in Jacksonville, an event which included the governor and his entire cabinet, Major Albert J. Russell was selected to speak and confer knighthood upon the Fair's Tournament winner.<sup>23</sup> In October, while in Baltimore getting funds for a Jacksonville housed Odd Fellows' hospital, the Baltimore Sun and Press reported that Major Russell had wearied of the impromptu talks requested about the virtues of Florida. He told some of them if they would hire a hall, he would address them en masse. The public showed up, and for an hour Major Russell spoke on "What can be done in Florida."<sup>24</sup>

Beginning on November 15, 1878, Jacksonville had its first successful afternoon newspaper, The Breeze, with A.J. Russell as its editor. The opening salutation was:

We hope to make the Breeze a permanent institution in our midst by making it non-partisan, non-sectarian, open-faced, open-hearted, live, liberal, level-headed, luminary; not sufficiently brilliant to obliterate the Sun, nor "Breezy" enough to blind the wayside Traveler with the dust we raise.<sup>25</sup>

There are no microfilm copies of The Breeze and only one original copy exists of the April 15, 1879, issue.<sup>26</sup> In

this one issue, two articles are especially interesting since their appearance reflects Russell's interests and the interests of the future State Superintendent of Education. One article, "Laws of 1879," addresses in satiric mirth a law affecting educational revenues. These people, he wrote, "are to be congratulated upon what our legislators failed to do rather than upon what they have done." For, it seems, the legislators had passed a law setting the educational millage at two and one-half, but failed to repeal the existing law, which had set the millage at five.<sup>27</sup> The total would have established a most liberal rate of seven and a half mills, by far the highest in the history of Florida. The legislators' options, he explained, were to receive the highest praise for carrying out the campaign pledges of Governor Drew to the people of Florida, or admitting to a legislative blunder and becoming consequently "legitimate subjects of public derision and laughter." The article's historical importance seems two-fold. First, it is one of the first written records we have of the satire and verbal powers of Major Russell; and secondly, it seems indicative of his growing interest and knowledge of state educational issues.

Another article, "The Exodus," tells of the plight of an emigration of some colored people from the South into Kansas. The colored emigrants were supposedly lured from the South by U.S. Government promises of a hundred and sixty acres of land through a hand bill circulated throughout the

Southern States. But when twelve hundred or more Negroes reached Wyandotte, the locals refused the emigrants admission. Unable to move forward because of guns, unable to return because of lack of money, it was "truly pitiful" for these "unfortunate human beings." The article ends with calls "for prompt and efficient assistance," since what the emigrants wanted most was "to get back to the South, where they are certain to get enough to feed and clothe them."<sup>28</sup>

Certainly this writing is not from the hands of a racist, and when viewed from the perspective of his life's work, it is not from the hand of a benevolent patriarch either. Russell spoke of the plight of "human beings" because it is how he saw them. Russell's "racial attitudes" were yet another feature of his prominence as State Educator. For Black education progressed tremendously during Superintendent Russell's administrations and often the advances and fortunes of the one were directly related to the advances and fortunes of the other.

For some time Jacksonville had become increasingly attractive for Blacks, even from the time of emancipation. Before the war, Negroes had constituted half of Jacksonville's population, and the war itself brought thousands more.<sup>29</sup> Many of these Negroes joined "Mr. Lincoln's Army" and became part of the Jacksonville occupational force. After the war, many Negro businessmen prospered.<sup>30</sup> Jacksonville Negroes prospered in other ways. One of three Negro lawyers admitted to the Florida Bar was

from Jacksonville, and one of Florida's six Negro Masonic lodges opened there in 1868. Edward Akin, who has done extensive research in Black political strength in Jacksonville, claims that "Bourbon Jacksonville was a biracial political community" and not one whose biracial strength depended on docile blacks doing bidding of their former masters.<sup>31</sup>

Educationally, the atmosphere was especially conducive for large social gains. One of the first Negro schools in Florida was established in Jacksonville as a war experiment. Intended as a fully integrated school, it opened with 199 students of both races. A year later the average daily attendance had increased to 160.<sup>32</sup> Also in 1865 the first training institution for Negroes opened in Jacksonville. It soon closed, but in 1868 the Freedman's Bureau built "the largest and finest school edifice in the state" for \$16,000. This was the Stanton Normal School, named after Secretary of War Edward Stanton. (Stanton High School still exists today, though as a fully integrated "Magnet School" in Duval County.) Its higher educational opportunities were to be integrated, but only one white student attended.<sup>33</sup>

One of if not the most powerful and vocal Negro voices belonged to Thomas Van Renssalaer Gibbs who moved to Jacksonville to teach school at Stanton. Thomas Gibbs was the son of Jonathon Gibbs, Florida's only black Superintendent of Education. The younger Gibbs had unlimited opportunities, but he chose teaching and he chose

Jacksonville. In 1884, the year Russell was appointed State Superintendent, Gibbs was elected to the Florida legislature from Duval County.<sup>34</sup> Gibbs was also even more influential educationally because the following summer he was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1885, which rewrote Florida's Constitution following Republican and Carpetbagger rule. In the historic session of 1887, Gibbs won appointments to three important committees, including the Committee on Education.<sup>35</sup> Gibbs joined the ranks of Duval teachers the year Russell assumed Chairmanship of the School Board. From 1877 to 1884 Russell was Gibbs' boss. They both left Jacksonville for Tallahassee politics in the same year, and unquestionably served on some committees together while in Jacksonville. Finally, with Russell's sympathetic and encouraging attitudes toward Negro education, it can only be assumed the relationship, at the least, was friendly and respectful.

Although the significance has not been investigated by any Florida historian, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of 1871 was Reverend Charles Beecher, brother to Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom's Cabin, who lived in Mandarin, a fringe neighborhood on the outskirts of Jacksonville.<sup>36</sup> It must be assumed that Jacksonville Negro education benefitted from the State Superintendent's ministerial and anti-slave sentiments felt, no doubt, even more strongly in his sister's home town.



Duval Superintendency

In 1876 Major Russell was made Chairman of the Duval Board of Public Instruction. There are no records giving account of his appointment, or from whom he received it. Surely, his community leadership skills, membership in the City Council's Committee on Education, and willingness to serve affected the decision. There is also an account of Russell serving on the Mayor's Committee on Education as early as 1868. This committee was to examine "the graded system of schools used in the North."<sup>37</sup>

Education was increasingly being taken more seriously, and at the same time, the Democratic party was wresting more and more control away from the carpetbagger Republican party. According to Jacksonville historian, T. Frederick Davis, "Local school affairs passed into the hands of the home people in 1877" and "public instruction became an educational rather than a political matter."<sup>38</sup> According to Thomas E. Cochran, before the election:

Men were chosen not on the basis of fitness for service, but with reference to party affiliation, thereby working disastrous results in respect to the educational welfare of the youth of the State. This is especially true from June 8, 1868, until January 1, 1877 during which time the government of the State was in the hands of a political party that was neither elected by, nor in favor with the majority of the intelligent voters and property owner of the State. Hence there were a great many who did not cooperate in the educational movements.<sup>39</sup>

Another reason for Russell's appointment was that in 1876 Duval County had the State's foremost position in education. State Superintendent W.W. Hicks listed only ten high schools in the state in 1876, eight white and two Negro.<sup>40</sup> In accordance with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, the definition of a high school was one whose "curriculum embraces Greek, Latin, Chemistry, Natural Philosophy, Astronomy, Physiology, Botany, and all the higher branches of Mathematics."<sup>41</sup> One of eight white high schools and one of the two Negro high schools were in Jacksonville.

State educational historian Nita Katherine Pyburn wrote that Duval Graded High School during this era "was developing into what later became known as a state high school to the extent it helped set the pattern for others to follow."<sup>42</sup> Boyce Fowler Ezell said Duval High "doubtless became a model for the later schools soon to be generally established."<sup>43</sup> Every state education history written, beginning with Bush's 1889 History of Education in Florida, singled out Duval High School for extended discussion. In fact Bush said, "In the advanced studies pursued, it is scarcely inferior to the colleges of the State."<sup>44</sup>

In 1877, The Florida Union reported on the Stanton Colored School:

The progresses...thus far have been remarkable, and Messrs. Russell, Fleming, and Rev. F. Pasco, at a recent visit, expressed themselves as well pleased. These gentlemen are members of the Board of Public Instruction for this county. 219 strangers have visited the school thus far representing the

following states - Vermont, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Minnesota, Georgia, and South Carolina.<sup>45</sup>

Stanton Institute had as many as 500 students and Duval High reported around 200. The elite status of both Duval High and Stanton also protected them from rather drastic cost saving measures. When it happened that schools were closed for lack of money, exceptions were made for Duval High and Stanton.<sup>46</sup>

The rest of the county was not so fortunate. A local education history published in 1939 reported that during the 1870's there were very few, if any, country white schools."<sup>47</sup> What white schools did exist were small and private, located wherever neighborhoods and farms were sufficiently populous.

According to every secondary source available, Albert J. Russell began to serve as County Superintendent in 1877. Primary records, however, show that Russell did not receive his appointment until February 16, 1880.<sup>48</sup> For some reason, there remains a lot of confusion surrounding Russell's term in office while in Duval County. Whereas all local histories credit him with three years extra service, the official state record, the Florida Superintendent of Schools 1845-1983 excludes him from county office altogether.<sup>49</sup>

Probably the idea that Russell began office in 1877 originated several different ways. 1877, for example, marked the end of Reconstruction and it is possible that the immensely popular Russell became associated with the return

of Democratic power. Lee E. Bigelow certainly groups Russell and the change in power of political parties in 1877.<sup>50</sup> Even Abbey Baker states in the "Life and Labors" that "In 1877 he was elected County Superintendent and continued in that office until 1884."<sup>51</sup>

Possibly the myth began because Russell and the actual Superintendent, Frederick Pasco, had often worked closely together for some time. While Russell was Grand Master of the Florida Masons, Pasco was an officer in the same Grand Lodge. The two men probably shared educational views as well. At the least, Pasco was a dedicated educator. A Harvard graduate, Pasco was to become, besides Duval Superintendent, the principal of Duval High School and the Superintendent of the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine.<sup>52</sup> Then too, it is possible the two men worked too closely together, for at one time Pasco complained of the vagueness with which the duties of the chairs of the Board and Trustees and Superintendent were prescribed. "They are not distinct enough," he said, "as in several cases it is made the duty of all three to attend the same thing."<sup>53</sup>

Regardless of whether or not he was County Superintendent in 1877, Russell did do something extraordinary that obviously demanded some overt position of authority. Partly because of his architectural and building construction background, and partly because of the attractive, airy and spaciousness of Anderson Seminary where

he graduated, State Superintendent Russell became noted for his tireless crusade to upgrade the physical conditions of school buildings. Early Florida classrooms were mostly dismal places, located in "dilapidated one-room schoolhouses or rented rooms lacking every necessity, even water, heating stoves, and privies."<sup>54</sup> Local histories tell the popular story of how "Albert J. Russell, Superintendent of Public Instruction, together with the Honorable Louis I. Fleming, Chairman of the Duval County Board of Public Instruction," surreptitiously made plans for the construction of a new, two-story school building early in 1877. Even though the community's attitude was slowly turning in favor of the highly successful Duval High School, its frugality would never have permitted the construction of what was to become at the time, if not Florida's finest, then its most solidly built school house. So, "fearing adverse criticism and controversy" Russell and Fleming quietly went about their plans and had the school built during the summer months for the beginning of the 1877-78 school year. According to Bigelow, "They figured that all the kicking and criticism could not affect an accomplished fact, but that if announced beforehand, they would encounter strenuous opposition."<sup>55</sup> What Jacksonville got was Florida's first brick schoolhouse.<sup>56</sup> And for a number of years thereafter, Duval High School was also the only high school in the state that possessed a building and a faculty all to itself.<sup>57</sup>

Architecturally, the building was modest, though well designed for academic purposes. There were two recitation rooms on the first floor, and one large lyceum room on the second. It included covered stairways on the outside of the building. With additions, it remained in use until it was destroyed by Jacksonville's great fire of 1901, nearly a quarter of a century later.<sup>58</sup>

Criticisms of County Superintendents across the state had been plentiful, both in general and in particular. Most of these criticisms reflected a complaint as did Superintendent Chase in 1868 that "there was a want of officers accustomed to the work, and of precedents to guide them."<sup>59</sup> In 1874, acting Superintendent McLin made a special appeal for trained County Superintendents, noting that many were unfit for their positions. Conditions were so bad he recommended a State Board of Examiners to certify them.<sup>60</sup> Of course, motivations for improvements and better performance were not always high among the county officials. The odium attached to free schools, as pauper institutions Chase spoke of, still remained.<sup>61</sup> The prestige attached to the office was not high. Then too, many county superintendents complained of the heavy work load necessary for a good school system and especially the low pay. Samuel Erwin, for one, complained that the low salaries "will not encourage us to expect the accomplishment of any very great amount of work." He complained that officials' salaries were even worse than low since they were paid in county

script (worth forty cents on the dollar). Remuneration paid, he went on to write to Haisley, "is not sufficient to induce men to neglect their private business to serve the public."<sup>62</sup>

These criticisms, those directed at and those coming from county superintendents, suggest yet another distinguishing feature of County Superintendent Russell. At the time of his appointment Russell was undoubtedly at the peak of his political rise in public service; he was socially prominent in the community, and he was quite successful as architect and builder. That he was willing to serve in such an office and for such low pay reveals the dedication he applied to the job. Ironically, and unlike all other State Superintendents immediately before him and thereafter, Major Russell was not an educator, yet his vision, drive and political skills shaped the foundation of Florida's educational system still in force today.

Many of his accomplishments and aspirations while superintendent of Duval County show Russell to be an educator ahead of his time. In many respects, his time as County Superintendent reveals a microcosm of his accomplishments and aspirations as State Superintendent. What he did in Duval County, in other words, he did for the state system, only on a larger scale.

While in Duval county, Major Russell began the state's first professional educational organization - the Duval County Teachers Association.<sup>63</sup> In 1886, Russell would

organize the first state professional educational organization, the Florida State Teachers' Association, forerunner of the Florida Education Association.<sup>64</sup> Russell strongly believed that teachers were two things: leaders and professionals. In a speech reported by the Times-Union to the Duval Teachers Association, Russell said that the educator is second only to the preacher of the gospel, that students were quick to spot ineptness and falsehood, and that "hundreds and thousands of the minds of the best men and women... were intellectually and morally second editions of the minds and characters of their preceptors." He challenged all teachers to grow and improve in their life's work. He asked them to ask themselves, "How can I improve?" He then encouraged teachers to join professional organizations, to read and subscribe to professional journals (he later started Florida's first), to follow mentors, to study work habits of successful lawyers, doctors, businessmen, and finally, "to push forward and upward until under the blessing of God you shall become giants among the educators of the land."<sup>65</sup>

When Duval High was being organized, first, school board member, then Superintendent Russell pressed to have the curriculum take four years instead of three to complete.<sup>66</sup> Four years, he argued, would give the students time to grasp all the subjects provided for study, essential to thorough mental training. Though opposed by the school board, who felt four years would be discouraging to too many



students, as well as too expensive, his efforts as State Superintendent eventually won them over. Russell argued as well that the primary, or elementary grades should extend for eight years. In Duval County under his administration, students were required to pass an entrance examination to enter high school. Russell argued that four years of high school were necessary to prepare one for college, which also needed to be divided into four years of study. Years later, he would refer to this concept, radical in those days, as an "Educational Superstructure."<sup>67</sup> And so, after years of effort, after maintaining strong ties with his home community while in Tallahassee, after sitting down as State Superintendent with Duval High principals, teachers and school board members over a period of several days, Russell convinced the Board to have Duval High converted to a four year high school. The first four year class of Duval High, and most probably in the state, graduated in June of 1889.<sup>68</sup>

Russell's report to Haisley suggests that "whether in a mixed school" (all grades in one room), "or in the graded city schools," Duval County students took eight years to complete elementary school. It is difficult to imagine all fifty Duval County schools, with high schools excepted, requiring eight graded years of study, considering local histories and testimonies of some of their authors. Probably Russell meant to imply that in the better schools, in the schools over which he managed to directly influence as Superintendent, whether "mixed" or "graded", it took eight years to graduate.<sup>69</sup>

The school year varied in Duval County. During his administration, the length of the average school year increased. Some schools however, maintained separate calendars from a low of 110 days, higher than many counties in the state, to 176 days, higher than any other county in the state. Duval High and Stanton certainly held classes for 176 days.<sup>70</sup>

Russell's report to Haisley also revealed that his beliefs in a meritocratic society, and that America's system of democratic government depended on the strength of its educational system, had already been well formed before he became State Superintendent. In this 1880 report, which by its end became a passionate philosophical expression, he bitterly attacked the prejudices in general against "free public education"; and he attacked specifically both the 1879 legislators and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. He was critical of the legislators for reducing state funds, and he was critical of Haisley's plan to concentrate those meager funds on the elementary grades. Interesting too, is his statement's pointedness. Most of Russell's speeches and writings contained only brief satirical remarks when he wanted to criticize. Mild chastisement for not attending institutes was as angry as he is ever documented as being. The vast bulk of his messages were encouragements and when occasion and a "quick supplication to God" called for it, they were inspirational. The following report to the State Superintendent and to the

Governor were none of these things.

The suggestion, made by some, to restrict by law the course in the public schools to the mere elementary branches in the old time parlance to the three Rs goes so nearly back to the old semi-heathen days of Rome, when the Plebeian was restrained and the Patrician advanced, that I cannot contemplate it without disgust and displeasure. Again, the rich and large property holders are taxed to educate the poor and it would seem but simple equity that while this matter of education was going on at the public expense, they who bear the burdens mostly would have the opportunity of an advanced education without the additional expense of a Private School, especially so when at the same time it affords a like opportunity for the children of the poor who would never have the opportunity but for so munificent a plan.

The argument advanced by some that the existence of schools of a higher grade excludes private enterprise, and prevents the incoming of men and women into our State because they would find private schools sufficiently remunerative, is so completely selfish as to fall far beneath the dignity of meriting a reply. So interwoven with the affections and admiration of the people, and so absolutely necessary to them that the Party of Administration who fails to foster the Public Schools, much more to curtail or lessen them, will meet with a fate equivalent to extinction, and justly so.

Respectfully,  
A. J. RUSSELL<sup>71</sup>

Other important features of Russell's county superintendency were that students should both manage themselves and be managed for success. Also, Russell discouraged cramming as a method of study. Whether this was intuitive knowledge or what would become modern learning

theory, or whether it was contemporary fear of the physical harm brought on by the hazards of schooling is not known. Regardless, public fear of cramming was evident, and physicians warned of the dangers of sitting too long, of studying too long and of the need for frequent recesses.

In the later years of his Duval Superintendency, a highly sensational article appeared in the Times-Union. The following is but a small part of it, taken from the introduction:

#### OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The driving process in most of the public schools of our cities is annually filling the cemeteries with little graves. The strong and healthy principals and teachers do not take into account the frailty of their young pupils in the mental tasks they set them. In Boston a few days ago a girl of thirteen years of age died of brain fever. During her delirium she recited page after page of history, and struggled with notes of music, pathetically crying to her parent, "Oh, mother, if I could only get these notes out of my head."<sup>72</sup>

Russell tried to instill in all students a sense of self-reliance. He did this because he believed life's successes were meritocratically achieved. When as State Superintendent, awarding diplomas to the graduates of Duval High, he told the entire assembly of teachers, parents, and full student body that success would come from a world of men asking "What have you done? What can you do?" Personal merit and achievement and character are the real tests applied to life and while at Duval High:

You young gentlemen and ladies will receive here in this school just what you earn by your own industry and honesty, hard work. If you fail it will be your sad lot to know it is your own fault; if you succeed, you will have the great joy and satisfaction of knowing you have earned it. I exhort you, therefore to earnest, honest work in all the future of your school years and days, as well as through all your future lives, that you may pass in that great day when all lives shall be reviewed before the unfailing judge.<sup>73</sup>

Belief in discipline was another characteristic of Russell's education and personal philosophy. His favorite teaching technique evidently was "synoptical," whereby students would have to transcribe lessons into their own words, which would fix the lesson permanently upon the mind, and at the same time reinforce the rules of grammar and composition.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, one of Russell's greatest contributions to Duval County, and then later to the entire state, was in popularizing public schools. Partly to instill confidence in the community about the quality of its teachers, Russell conducted and supported teacher examinations to test their fitness and qualifications. As a result of these exams, many teachers were dismissed and he was able to report to the State Superintendent, "there are now as fine a corps of teachers, both white and colored, employed as can be found anywhere."<sup>75</sup>

Much of the increase in public acceptance was due to the affiliations Russell had with the grand cause, with the restoration of Jacksonville following its defeat, and with

the contacts he had made and had during his many political offices. According to Bigelow:

Hon. Albert J. Russell, who was Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1877, and the Hon. Louis I. Fleming, were both popular in Jacksonville and Duval County. That both were men of character and integrity was beyond question; and their standing in the community was such that it had a beneficial effect for it to be known that one was the county superintendent and other the chairman of the Board of Public Instruction. Almost immediately direct and active opposition began slowly changing to a lukewarm acceptance of the school law and public schools, and gradually, if but slowly genuine interest began developing.<sup>76</sup>

As ex-governor Reed put it, Russell was able to increase public financial support for free, public education because people "responded to the call of a Confederate soldier, and not a 'carpet bagger'."<sup>77</sup>

State educational historian and Superintendent William N. Sheats concurred:

In arousing the popular mind to a proper appreciation of the public schools, it hardly admits of question that Superintendent Russell was better suited to the work and succeeded beyond any of his predecessors.<sup>78</sup>

The ground work was prepared for larger things during Russell's term as County Superintendent. It was time to go to Tallahassee.

# Notes

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6     Florida: A Hundred Years Ago (Coral Gables, June, 1965); Martin, City Makers, 182.

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## CHAPTER SIX RECONSTRUCTION AND BOURBON FLORIDA

### Reconstruction Florida

In the twelve years that marked Florida's Reconstruction period, everything and nothing happened. Within the state, confusion, resentment, and violence were everywhere. Politically and economically it was a period of factionalism. Progress, like time, rolled unavoidably on, but thematically and educationally studied, Florida's progresses were achieved in a circuitous and counter-productive manner. Rather than a cooperative grand scheme, antagonistic factions prevailed, and as often as not, hatred, mistrust, greed and corruption became the binding force that held them all together. Basic to the state's problems was the inability of the old, white, established order, the Negro freedmen, and the white Republican carpetbagger "hateful imports" to co-exist peacefully.

Politically there would be no voice from the people for a long time. Rather than being able to elect a governor to supersede John Milton, who had committed suicide, the state had its governor appointed by the President of the United States. Johnson appointed a Unionist, Federal Judge William Marvin from Key West, as Provisional Governor. Marvin's first act was to call for a post-war constitutional

convention, but much of the legislation was rejected by President Johnson. Furthermore, the President insisted that Florida repudiate the war debt of \$2,100,000 and that civil rights be extended to freedmen.<sup>1</sup>

Strong domestic interests resulting from the war's devastation also contributed to the lack of voice in Tallahassee. When the opportunity came to replace the federally appointed Provisional Governor, only four thousand voters cast their ballots, as opposed to fourteen thousand prior to secession. Florida lost even more of its voice when the national election of 1866 put radical Republicans in charge of Washington. Soon, Johnson's reconstruction program, too moderate for these radicals, was replaced by one of their own,<sup>2</sup> under which Florida was forced to submit to military rule, and was assigned to the Third Military District under Major General John Pope. One of Pope's first acts was to void the new constitution. A legislative committee from Tallahassee cried out in protest.

Our present relations with the general government are certainly of a strange character. Beyond the postal service, our people derive no benefit from our existence as a State in the Union. We are denied representation even when we select a party who has never in fact sympathized with armed resistance to the United States, and who can, in good faith, take the oath. We are at the same time subject to the most onerous taxation; the civil law of the State is enforced and obeyed only if it meets the approval of the local commander of the troops of the United States; the Congress of the United States enacts laws making certain lands subject to

entry at a small cost by the colored portion of our population, and denies the like privilege to the white man by restrictions amounting to a prohibition. We are, in fact, recognized as a State for the single and sole purpose of working out our own destruction and dishonor.<sup>3</sup>

General Pope called for yet another constitutional convention, this time with freedmen having the franchise. Previously elected U.S. Senators William Marvin and Wilkinson Call were denied seats in the Senate. Governor Walker became a figurehead. At the military-supervised election to the convention, white registered voters were outnumbered by freedmen 15,500 to 11,151. Whites tried unsuccessfully to nullify the election by staying away from the polls. Of 14,500 votes cast, 13,283 were freedmen votes. Elected to the convention were only two Southern Democrats compared to eighteen freedmen, fifteen carpetbaggers and eleven scalawags.<sup>4</sup>

Besides problems caused by military and federal rule, the old order which had reigned in Tallahasee was replaced. Instead of Democrats and Whigs, the halls of the State Capitol now teemed with Unionists, Whigs, Democrats, Republicans, and later, freedmen, who were largely controlled by the Republican party. According to ex-slave, Yankee soldier, State Senator and educator John Wallace, whiskey flowed plentifully and bribes for votes during the normal legislative sessions became the rule. Many of the freedmen legislators were so illiterate they tried to read the legislative journals upside down.<sup>5</sup> Rump conventions

were called. Military guards were frequently called out to patrol the capitol building.

Though by most accounts, Reconstruction Florida fared better than the other Confederate States, but corruption, greed and physical violence were commonplace for years to come. Even when Reconstruction came to an end with the first Democratic victory in 1877, the true interests of the people continued to be secondary to the new political battles which were to be carried out until the turn of the century between the railroad Bourbon Democrats and the wiregrass Democrats.

Outside its political problems, there was yet another Florida. To most Northerners and Europeans, Florida continued to be perceived as a dark, uncharted and forbidden land. According to Williamson:

...the state's name evoked thoughts of swamps, marshes, canebrakes, and alligators. Adventurous tourists fancied that in visiting Florida they were absenting themselves from civilization. Most immigrants from Europe, coming to the United States through the port of New York, either stayed in the ghettos of the East or homesteaded in the West. Few came south, and few of these individualistic ones selected the sparsely settled peninsula despite its mild climate, fertile land in the public domain, and vast pine, cypress and hardwood forests.<sup>6</sup>

Two things had to happen before any real legislative or educational progress could be achieved. Political stability needed to be realized, and the image of Florida as a land of "snakes and alligators" had to change. The return to Democratic party control in Tallahassee in 1877 did much to

stabilize the politics of the state, just as the increasing population did much to change the state's image.

Slowly at first, then increasingly, Florida's population doubled to what it was in the days just before the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> With civil order and domestic routine resumed, the new population, comprised largely of freedmen, Northern migrants and European immigrants, began manifesting concern for things other than short-range survival interests. Education was foremost among these interests; its motivators were primarily parental concern and gubernatorial desire to lift the educational levels of the population and to assimilate the incoming tide of new citizens. Unquestionably, the new status of the Negro created problems for the state government in Tallahassee. The biggest problem was caused by the huge number of freedmen in the state, for they comprised approximately 49 percent of the state's population.<sup>8</sup>

What this meant to government was that on top of war-widowed homes, disrupted economy and federal occupation, close to one in two Floridians had little to no property, money, or job skills outside of agriculture or servitude. Almost all freedmen were illiterate. While many historians feel relations between the two races were sympathetic, forces beyond them continued to distance their political positions and to determine those positions based on race.



### Educational Issues During Reconstruction

The first real legislative interest in education since the war came from the Republican written Constitution of 1868 and the School Law of 1869. According to Article IX, Section 1, the State promised "ample provisions for the education of all the children...without distinction or preference." Ample provision was defined as "a uniform system of common schools and a university." The system was to be funded by sundry fines, exemptions from military duty and twenty-five percent of the taxes from the sale of state lands. To this would be added a special tax of one mill on all taxable property. Counties were expected to raise by tax a sum not less than one-half of the money apportioned to them by the State.<sup>9</sup>

But by 1870 State Superintendent Henry Quarles reported that the system "has made little or no progress" and added that "education encounters fearful obstacles."<sup>10</sup> In 1871 Superintendent Beecher reported that only twenty percent of school aged children were actually enrolled in public schools.<sup>11</sup> The following year an agent of the Peabody Fund reported "unusual difficulties to deal with."

What some of those difficulties were can be understood when it is known that in many counties in 1869 there was an almost total lack of school-houses; added to this was the small number of competent teachers and the insufficiency of the school funds. One county reports that previous to 1869 "the schools were kept in small cabins, out-houses, and sometimes in dwellings, by itinerant teachers who scarcely ever professed to teach

anything higher than Webster's  
Spelling Book and arithmetic as far  
as compound numbers."<sup>12</sup>

Another progressive law passed in 1872 called for all common schools to be graded, and furthermore that they be divided into primary, intermediate and grammar, but Bush reported that through the Reconstruction years this law was also ignored except for a few Peabody-aided schools.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of this legislative intent, the "fearful obstacles" were well-entrenched obstacles affecting every area necessary to the growth and support of a comprehensive educational system. Some obstacles were pre-war while others were post-war, but the combination effectively prevented Florida from establishing a comprehensive educational system for almost another twenty years.

#### Public Attitude Toward Free, Public Education

In the white community, education at any expense was deemed important only to the educated and affluent population, a decided minority. Those who most wanted schools were usually those who could afford to pay for them. Free education had a long history of negative connotations. Free schools were typically referred to as "poor schools" or "charity schools." In 1870, C. Thurston Chase, Florida's first full time Superintendent of Public Instruction wrote:

That obstacles would arise was not unexpected. What was more natural than that owners of large and unproductive estates would be adverse to taxation for the education of children in whom they had no special interest... The ulterior object of free schools was questioned. Might they not be perverted, it was asked, for personal or political

ends? Cautious men entertained doubts concerning the management that should control them...Besides, a sort of odium [was] attached to free schools, as pauper institutions.<sup>14</sup>

While taxation may have made public education more unpopular, it must be remembered that in the young and pioneering state of Florida, education was already low on the list of its priorities. So low in fact, education was more a legislative addendum than anything else. When Florida first became a state in 1845 and for decades prior while a territory, educational matters were handled in an ex-officio manner, meaning the duties were not specified and ancillary to another office. Mostly these offices belonged to those of the state register of public lands, or treasurer. It was twenty years after statehood, in 1867, before the new federally enrolled legislature established an office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The idea that educational matters deserved a full-time position and full-time superintendent, then, was a Northern import and not indigenous to Florida.

These legislated educational acts created an even stronger distaste for public education among most Floridians than before. The new constitution called for education of freedmen as well as white children "without distinction or preference," and almost everywhere existed the idea that Negroes were getting a free education paid for entirely by the white population. Since, went the notion, Negroes owned no property, were not working and paying sufficient taxes,

educational revenue had to come entirely from the unwilling, white taxpayer.<sup>15</sup> This attitude toward Negro public education carried over into the whole concept of public education. According to William Sheats in his 1894 report:

It is evident that just prior to the Civil War, public sentiment was rapidly inclining towards a free school system; but the conditions during that period and the darker days of reconstruction were not favorable to foster in the hearts of the people the idea of free public schools supported by taxation, when after the war, all the taxes were to come from one class, and the general government at Washington was threatening to force upon them the odious doctrine of co-education of the races.<sup>16</sup>

#### Population, Transportation and Economics

Besides Reconstruction politics and the war's devastation, population distribution, lack of transportation and agricultural domination continued to inhibit educational and economic growth. Florida was the most sparsely settled state in the country. In 1870 there were only 187,748 persons in the state,<sup>17</sup> and even as late as 1880 it could boast of only three sizable cities: Key West with 9,890 people; Jacksonville with 7,650; and Pensacola with 6,845.<sup>18</sup> Lack of roads to connect this sparsely settled population helped perpetuate the system of isolated, little log cabins or frame schools that of necessity had to be within walking distance of their pupils. In open and well drained pine barrens, roads could be easily cut and maintained, but maintaining roads through much of the state was a serious problem with the swamplands and tangled live oak hammocks

and their persistent, unrelenting undergrowth. In many areas of the state rainy weather turned clay into guagmire, and east of the St. Johns River firm roadbeds were all but impossible. Wheeled vehicles, necessary for transportation of commerce and agriculture, never became a practical method of transportation.<sup>19</sup>

Railroads, which were soon to become the dynamic force in Florida's prosperity, were in little better shape than the roads. Military destruction and physical deterioration combined with bankruptcy, and financial manipulation marked the post-war period until the Disston land sale in the early eighties. In fact, for the first fifteen years after the war, only sixteen miles of railroads were completed throughout the state and very few improvements to the existing tracks were made.<sup>20</sup> Lack of railroads not only inhibited agricultural profits, it inhibited as well shifts to other forms of economic growth.

Because farming continued to be the way of life for most Floridians, education continued to be deemed as unnecessary, indeed often counter-productive for a good harvest. Agricultural research that would stress anything but traditional farming practices was at least twenty years away in 1870. The end of slavery and the decline of cotton futures created hard agricultural times for Florida for some time. The Negro was no longer a slave, but for the most part he was no more than a laborer without property. Conditioned by generations of slavery, emancipation left

many freedmen without any guidance or sense of direction. Sharecropping, as much as anything else, became a way of life for the freedmen for decades. Neither the white man nor the freedman understood the wage labor system even if there had existed currency with which to pay wages. The white landlord with substantial acreage had nothing without laborers--the freedmen, and many whites had only their labor potential. In the end, neither the tenant nor the landlord succeeded. In spite of the white Floridian's lament over the vast amount of land made available by the Homestead Act of 1866 to loyalists and freedmen only, it did not alter nearly as much of Florida's economic picture as was anticipated. A year later, only two-thirds of the 3,000 homesteads were still farmed, and most of that on poor land whose crops were often intimidation and harassment by local whites.<sup>21</sup>

A stifled economy, agricultural domination, sparsely settled population, and lack of transportation all combined to perpetuate the poor quality and decentralized system of Florida education. Where there was urban concentration and money, some white schools enjoyed relative prosperity and provided better learning. Where there was urban population and Northern missionary and Freedman's Bureau money, there were better schools for Negroes.

#### Bourbon Florida

George Drew's election as Governor in 1876 marked the end of Reconstruction in Florida. The end of Republican

rule and the withdrawal of Federal troops, however, did not signify much more than the beginning of an uncomfortable alliance of all white Floridians which would dominate for the next quarter of a century. Long range plans, and almost all educational advances were still years away, of secondary importance to the indebtedness and the realization that railroads, factories and cities were necessary to lessen Florida's dependence on cotton and agriculture.

Philosophically, Bourbons believed in the importance of public education, but the tunnel vision business interests, coupled with an almost passionate regard for frugality, meant little money and little support for things other than the briefest schooling. Drew's inaugural message to the legislature set the tone for his administration:

That government will be most highly esteemed that gives the greatest protection to individual and industrial enterprises at the least expense to the taxpayer...Spend nothing unless absolutely necessary and pay all bills when made, or at the earliest point thereafter.<sup>22</sup>

No one, possibly not even Drew himself realized how prophetic those words would be. Educational progress would again be postponed under the conservative government's frugality. Operating expenses, which never seriously recognized educational obligations during Reconstruction, fell from a modest \$212,530.31 in 1877, to \$133,970.36 in 1878. When the legislature failed to lower the twelve and a half mill ad valorem tax on property, Drew slashed it to nine. A year later, the legislature followed his approval

and dropped the millage in property all the way to seven. By the time Drew's administration was over, the State operated with a budget deficit of over \$100,000.<sup>23</sup>

Although falling short of actually providing funds for his educational proposals, Drew at least expressed his respect for a free school system. During his opening remarks to the Legislature, he said, "It is cheaper to build schoolhouses and maintain schools than to build poorhouses and jails and support paupers and criminals."<sup>24</sup> Drew's Superintendent of Public Instruction, William P. Haisley was equally as conservative in money matters. In his 1879-1880 Biennial Report, Haisley recommended limiting state support of education "to the common school branches," both as a way of conserving expenses and of making the most efficient use of public funds.<sup>25</sup> It was the same theme he had used in his earlier report to the Governor.

Besides the idea of conserving revenues, Haisley and Drew felt education beyond basic communication and arithmetic skills was where "state obligation ends and individual responsibility begins." Haisley did recommend the establishment and maintenance of a few city high schools, but only if they were voted in by the local population who supported an additional local tax. In what was intended as a blow for professionalism, Haisley also recommended that only those who had had "actual experience in teaching be eligible to the office of County Superintendent." Ironically, it was a requirement that



would have prohibited Albert J. Russell from assuming office in Jacksonville as Duval County Superintendent of Schools had it become law.

Neither the Governor nor Superintendent were advocates of higher education in Florida beyond establishment of a normal school for the express purpose of providing for "the great want of trained teachers for the common schools."<sup>26</sup> Plans for the Florida Agricultural College to be located at Eau Gallie never progressed beyond the discussion stage.

Florida's shift, begun by George Drew, from wiregrass Democrat to Bourbon Democrat was accelerated by the next Governor, William D. Bloxham.

Bloxham's first move was to attempt relief from Florida's huge indebtedness of fourteen million dollars.<sup>27</sup> Bankruptcy seemed imminent. The shift from agricultural to railroad concerns probably would have happened anyway, but the seriousness of the debt crisis prompted immediate and drastic measures. In what is probably Florida's most controversial act, Governor Bloxham and Hamilton Disston negotiated a contract whereby Florida would get one million dollars to pay the interest rate on its indebtedness, and Disston would get twenty-five million acres of Florida's land and swamp.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of the controversy, the sale did two irrefutable things. First, it put Florida in better fiscal condition and proved to European and Northern investors that it could make good on its bonds. Furthermore, it put Florida on the world map. Word of the

sale and the opportunities it presented attracted settlers and investors as never before. Secondly, from then on and at least through the Bourbon era, big money, big deals and big dreams were to dominate Florida's economic and legislative affairs. Little, well-built houses failed to materialize.

Educational Issues During Bourbonism (1877-1884)

In spirit, the Bourbons and Governor Bloxham believed in the importance of education, and Bloxham often spoke out on its behalf. Both realized that in order to attract settlers from states with better and more established school systems, Florida would have to be able to offer schools for the incoming population. Then too, many European immigrants needed to be taught English and the customs of the new country. As Florida "industrialized" and farmers headed into urban communities, new skills needed to be taught to the work force, skills that necessitated reading and arithmetic.

In his inaugural address, Bloxham outlined his plan to improve the interest, welfare and prosperity of Florida when he said "we must invite a healthy immigration, develop our natural resources by securing proper transportation and educate the rising population."<sup>29</sup> At the same time, however, both Bloxham and Superintendent E.K Foster continued to support low taxation for schools, recommending federal aid to assist the state's school expenses. Foster's bi-ennial report to the Governor rationalized that "The

general or national government depends upon the proper and careful use of the ballot for its safety, and should be willing to do its share in aiding the States in educating the future voter."<sup>30</sup>

In what was easily Bloxham's greatest educational contribution, Duval County School Superintendent Albert J. Russell received the appointment to become Florida's next State Superintendent in 1884.<sup>31</sup> But in 1884, almost forty years after statehood and almost twenty years after the Civil War, Florida still lacked a comprehensive educational system. Essentially, as a state system, Florida had a decentralized authority, dissimilar textbooks, school terms, and teacher certification. In the "dual-system" which provided schools for Negroes, conditions were generally worse. Without Peabody funds, the Freedman's Bureau and Northern Missionary money, conditions would undoubtedly have been much worse than they were.

#### Higher Education

No real system, or school of public higher education existed at the beginning of Post-reconstruction Florida. Two seminaries existed, the East Florida Seminary in Gainesville and the West Florida Seminary in Tallahassee. But these forerunners of the University of Florida and Florida State University were not true institutions of higher education since they only offered classes from kindergarten through advanced classes in common school. Lacking funds, even Peabody money, failing to attract

students outside of their respective counties, combined with the absence of collegiate curriculum, these institutions were in the words of State Superintendent Haisley, "ordinary high schools."<sup>32</sup> Superintendent of the East Florida Seminary Edwing P. Carter wrote that in 1877 "the seminary was little more than a public school for Gainesville,"<sup>33</sup> and he instituted plans to advance the curriculum, mostly by dropping lower classes and raising the minimum age to thirteen for all students. Improvements were made, but even as late as 1883 he reported, "This institution is a school, not a college."<sup>34</sup>

Superintendent Edgar of the West Florida Seminary had similar experiences when he wrote in 1877, "After a careful examination into the condition of the seminary it seemed to me that the institution was neither subserving the main purpose for which it was established nor was it, in a proper sense, organized on a collegiate basis."<sup>35</sup> And as late as 1889, although improvements had been made, Dr. Edgar wrote that the design of courses was to prepare boys and young men for admission into university classes...".<sup>36</sup>

#### Normal Education

Florida's first real venture into higher education was through its normal schools, since normal schooling provided the only public education beyond high school classes. In 1882 normal departments were opened in both Florida Seminaries. In 1883, the legislature appropriated \$3,000 for normal expenditures.<sup>37</sup> Classes were to be free, open

to whites over the age of fifteen, who exhibited good moral character and indicated a preference for a teaching career, and who would also promise to remain in school for two years and then teach for an equal amount of time after graduation.

### Dual Education

Two features distinguish the history of Florida education for Negroes. One is that Florida probably led the South in educational opportunities for Negroes;<sup>38</sup> and the second is that Northern money was critical to the successes enjoyed during and immediately after Reconstruction. Monies came in from multiple sources, but primary among them was the Freedman's Bureau for government money<sup>39</sup>. From the private sector, the African Civilization Society and the Home Missionary Society of the African M.E Church were heavy contributors.<sup>40</sup>

In 1865 the legislature made provisions for freedmen's education and levied a tax of one dollar upon "all male persons of color between the ages of 21 and 45 years, and a tuition of each student of fifty cents a month."<sup>41</sup> In the first year 2,726 enrolled. A commissioner was appointed who started 20 day schools and 30 night schools.<sup>42</sup>

Not all freedmen attended State schools; many if not most attended schools that were partially if not entirely supported by out-of-state funds. Practically all schools of distinction and schools which offered any sort of advanced studies were schools dependent on money from Northern churches, missionaries, or the Freedman's Bureau.

Whether or not freedmen's schools were run to the satisfaction of those most concerned depends on the source of the observation. On paper at least, Florida was committed. The Constitutional Convention of 1868 and the laws that followed in 1869 provided for a dual system of education. Article IX of the Constitution called for "ample provisions for the education of all the children...without distinction or preference." Section Two of that act called for a "uniform system of common schools and a university" with free instruction.<sup>43</sup> The education bills were written without reference to color. But these legislative acts were written and passed by a Reconstruction legislature which often acted independently, if not in contrast to the opinions of the pre-war voting public. Two of the more prominent black schools, the Union Academy in Gainesville and the Lincoln Academy in Tallahassee, operated pretty much in isolation from the rest of the community and both depended heavily on Northern money. Teachers and administrators of the Union Academy reported strong resentment from the white population in Gainesville.<sup>44</sup> One impartial statistic probably says more than anything else regarding the popularity and success of freedman education in Florida. Although freedmen represented almost half the population, Negro students' attendance averaged only about 2,000 for the entire state during reconstruction. As late as 1876 there were only twelve schools for Negroes,<sup>45</sup> even though in earlier years the figure had climbed to as high as

seventy-one staffed by a total of only sixty-four teachers, half of whom were white.<sup>46</sup>

The consensus among Florida historians is that Florida had no program for Negro higher education until the 1880's.<sup>47</sup> Certainly the system was never "separate but equal" as even the official reports document. Russell's predecessor, Superintendent Foster, wrote that qualifications for Negro teachers in 1876 were not defined since there were so few of them. Training for Negro teachers was non-existent. When certification procedures were initiated, the prerequisite examinations had easier questions than those of the prospective white teachers.<sup>48</sup>

#### Public Attitude Towards Public Education

Race and reconstruction issues did not account for all of the public's attitude toward public education. Historically, free, public education had always been equated with charity schooling; some went so far as to embrace the idea that free schooling would destroy democracy. Those who could afford private schools were used to paying for them. Public education essentially had two forces to oppose its acceptance. One force was that it operated at taxpayers' expense for those who paid no taxes; and, second, it encouraged or, indeed, forced interaction of different socio-economic classes even in a dual system. Florida's pioneering, frontier spirit, however, made the spirit of democracy a popular ideal throughout the state; and there had always existed a strong undercurrent of support for

free, public education.<sup>49</sup> But always this undercurrent found itself dominated by stronger forces on the very active political surface of state legislation. Not until the frontier was conquered and populated, with transportation provided for, with political strife lessened, did Florida have time and interest in educating its populace.

### Summary

Bourbon Florida was more progressive educationally than Florida during Reconstruction; however, Bourbons were often guilty of being long on praise but short on provisions for public education. When Albert J. Russell took office in 1884, education was essentially de-centralized, meaning schools were run for the most part at the county level. There were no secondary school system, no higher education system, no schools for the handicapped, no curriculum for industrial skills, no system for teacher education, and lastly, no voice strong enough to unite all these factions of education into one integrated, state-wide system of public education.



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CHAPTER SEVEN  
FLORIDA EDUCATION UNDER THE RUSSELL ADMINISTRATION

Appointment, First Six Months and Overview

On March 3, 1884, William N. Sheats wrote the State Superintendent's office in Tallahassee requesting supplies, He was informed by return mail that the supplies were being ordered, and that "Honorable A.J. Russell is now State Superintendent."<sup>1</sup> It seems a curious twist of fate that the man who would replace Russell as Superintendent almost nine years later was, outside of those directly involved, the first to find out through official channels about A.J. Russell's superintendency. Since the surviving records of Bloxham's appointments are discontinuous, the details behind his motivation and Russell's appointment must remain a mystery. Because of the suddenness of his appointment, even Russell's hometown paper, The Florida Times-Union, had only a brief mention of Bloxham's action.<sup>2</sup>

Why Russell became the choice of Bloxham, therefore, cannot be determined. But Russell had to have appeared strong candidate. Bloxham had long expressed interest in upgrading the state's educational system; and Russell was, and had been for some time, operating the most successful county educational system in Florida. Jacksonville's Duval High School was easily the best high school in the state;

and Duval County, with 176 days, had the longest academic school year in the state.<sup>3</sup> Russell had become a most visible County Superintendent who had expressed his opinions freely and forcefully regarding State educational policy. Jacksonville was a leading power in the state politically, and Russell was extremely popular there both as a citizen and as a spokesman for the Democratic party. In 1880, when Bloxham was running for the office of governor, Russell was chosen as a presidential elector. (Another presidential elector, J.E. Yonge, was appointed to Bloxham's cabinet in 1881 as adjutant general.<sup>4</sup> Russell was again nominated as elector in 1884, but "being a member of the Governor's Cabinet he declined.")<sup>5</sup>

Russell's appointment. According to a biographical report in The Florida Dispatch, Bloxham's invitation to Russell was made "most unexpectedly to him." The same piece claims Russell expressed feelings of "inadequacy to the responsible work; but having entered it, he soon found both heart and brain enlisted, and went heartily to work."<sup>6</sup> Since there was such absence of publicity surrounding Russell's appointment, it is probably accurate to say he received it unexpectedly. That he engaged in his duties heartily is more certainly accurate. In fact, the first six months of his term could be viewed as a microcosm of his entire administration.

The day after he assumed office, Russell was in Lake City to make a "Silver-Tongued" oration at the dedication of

the Agricultural College. It is impossible to know just how much time or how prepared Russell was for this speech. It is possible the speech was given extemporaneously, but as reported in the Times-Union the speech was eloquent. More importantly, consciously or unconsciously on Russell's part, seminal ideas were expressed here and the devotion he would come to give to the College became key features of his educational philosophy of his success as State Superintendent.

The speech must have been one of the finer moments in Russell's administration. Although it was winter, it was a late February, Florida day. The sky was bright blue and the temperature over 70°. <sup>7</sup> Close to one thousand people attended the dedication and heard Russell's speech. In 1873, '74, and '75 Russell had been Grand Master (presiding officer for the State) of the Masons, and gathered there were the largest assemblage of the Masons "ever seen in Lake City." Over the platform from which he spoke was a sweeping arch constructed of moss. From its center hung the Masonic emblem, a large "G" made of evergreens. <sup>8</sup>

In the dedication ceremony, which included laying the cornerstone, Russell stressed the need for more substantial construction (i.e. masonry buildings) that "may safely repose through the ravages of time. Thus may a people connect their past with their future, and by it inculcate lessons of home love and national pride and patriotism." The foundations of these buildings should be "integrity, fixedness of purpose and rectitude of life." Once erected,

the building would become a symbol of the new South and allow her to throw her "bedraggled robes in the dust of conquered humiliation to the winds, and bend all her energies in the achievement with all her sister States for the grand and glorious success that now spans our whole country." For the college classroom he asked

What system of calculus would  
you introduce with which to measure  
the ever onward march and conquest  
of minds, unfolded and strengthened  
and fitted for life's great work  
by the pursuit of its future  
curriculum?<sup>9</sup>

After the speech, the Masons marched in procession to their hall, where resolutions of appreciation were passed. Following this, they joined the townspeople for an exhibition of Lake City's new fire engine.<sup>10</sup>

In the next days, Superintendent Russell and his wife, Julia, undoubtedly spent time making the necessary domestic arrangements to accommodate his new cabinet position in Tallahassee. For the interim between E.K. Foster and Russell, H.N. Felkel, a prominent educator, handled routine correspondence. That the appointment was indeed sudden and unexpected probably explains why Felkel did not inform John Eaton, U.S. Commissioner of Education in Washington, of Foster's resignation until late March.<sup>11</sup>

Russell's next project was the site selection and construction of an asylum for the deaf and dumb which had recently been approved by the legislature. It is quite possible he went straight from Lake City to St. Augustine,

for by all accounts Russell became intimate with every aspect of the project within a short time. On March 31, in his first letter written as State Superintendent, Russell stated:

The site selected is a beautiful one commanding the scenery and the invigorating breezes of the Atlantic, and combining all that class of circumstances so necessary to the development of the Deaf-Mute by attracting his observation and arousing his spirit of inquiry and resulting in his mental development.<sup>12</sup>

In mid April Russell returned to St. Augustine and spent several days to a week there. The blueprints, a specialty of Russell's, were being drawn and notices had to be prepared to invite bids for the construction.<sup>13</sup>

Returning to Tallahassee, Russell began writing a flurry of letters announcing his intentions of upgrading Florida education. His immediate, short range plan focused on two methods. One was to upgrade the certification process by which teachers were selected in their respective counties; and the other was to begin teacher institutes--traveling seminars brought to the various counties with lectures and discussions on how to teach. On April 25 he wrote two letters to these effects. In a letter to Sam Erwin of Jackson County, Russell enclosed a copy of questions for a second class certificate and added:

I think it high time that our teachers were brought up to the standards of the best educators in the other states. The



teacher in the remotest country district should be able to teach any pupil who may come to him from a forward school in another section of the county or state. We are inviting immigration from other nations, and it is incumbent upon us to supply schools with such teachers as may be required to instruct the children they bring to us.<sup>14</sup>

To W. T. Henderson in Hillsborough, Russell chided the Superintendent for not responding to an earlier inquiry regarding a proposed institute in Tampa.

I am desirous of awakening a more lively interest in education and feel satisfied that these institutes will contribute to that end. Will you recognize my wishes and cooperate with me in this matter?<sup>15</sup>

A week later he wrote two letters that offer a glimpse into both Russell's personality and the level of interest he had for teacher institutes. In the office for barely two months, after an "unexpected" appointment and relocation to Tallahassee, he was anxious to improve the quality of education in the state, and he was anxious to have his ideas and plans implemented. To Superintendents J.O Jones in Live Oak and J. Potsdamen in Lake City, Russell wrote an exactly worded letter.

I am very much disappointed at the results of your efforts on behalf of the proposed institute in which I had hoped to bring the teachers of three counties together for instruction (his underscoring) that they might be taught how to teach....

And then, in a style he used in the early part of his administration until his own power and recognition were known throughout the state, Russell invoked the power of the governor and legislature. Any apathy or ineptitude on the part of local school boards or county superintendents, which had prompted constant complaints from all the previous state superintendents, would no longer be tolerated. Lack of proper response or actions to Russell's inquiries he said

...afford me a glimpse into the true status of your school interests, and enable me to submit such a report to the coming legislature as I trust will awake that body and the people to a just sense of duty toward public schools.<sup>16</sup>

That same day, in a letter to Hamilton County Superintendent J.N. Reid, Russell discussed plans for a "grand institute" to be held the following month.<sup>17</sup> The grand institute would be an attempt to hold an institute not for just one county, but for several, and would solicit as many teachers from as far away as would come. On May 3, Russell wrote still another letter to W.T. Henderson regarding the proposed Tampa institute. Using a softer tone than in his previous one a week and a half earlier, "Many of our teachers," he said, "are afraid of institutes because they think they are testing, criticizing affairs--impress them with fact. Remember, I am not a 'boss,' but a servant and brother."<sup>18</sup>

By the end of May, the State Superintendent had taken ill, and either returned to or remained at home in Jacksonville.<sup>19</sup> According to a letter written by Ashley D.

Hurt, the first president of the Florida Agricultural College, Russell was to meet in Lake City with the Board of Trustees on July 31.<sup>20</sup> Added to all these activities, Russell spent much of his time visiting county districts around the state.

On August 5 Russell was in Jacksonville to deliver a speech at Metropolitan Hall entitled "Education and Democracy." The Times-Union printed "a tolerably full report" of it and the speech was reviewed quite favorably by the reporter. The Hall was attended by both white and colored people. The speech, besides the "fire and fervor" with which it was delivered, is noteworthy because it was a seminal, summational and stylistic expression of Russell's philosophy and administration.

In the speech Russell alluded to the popular prejudices against public education in the state. He then invoked national pride, stressing not only the greatness of American meritocracy, but that both were made possible by a representative government at the heart of which was the vote. "One man's vote," he said, "however ignorant...is an offset to any other vote, however intelligent."

The history of governments shows us conclusively that where intelligence prevailed, success and grand achievements were the rule and where ignorance prevailed, rational disintegration, squalidness and vice were the legitimate consequences.

The rise and fall of great nations was then described. Leading these were ancient Phoenicia and Egypt, whose

"mighty pyramids out in an ocean of sand" crumbled along with their governments and people into a pitiful state. Rome, "mistress of the world with her patrician and her plebian system; or rather, her patrician system and her plebian neglect" suffered the same fate. So too did grand old England, until the reformation and Lancaster made possible the education of the masses.

There existed, Russell claimed, a race to settle our great nation, a race "between the States as to which shall be superior in strength, wealth, intellect and social standing, contributing most to the glory and success of our common country."

Imagine, if you can, Florida, with her generous climate, soil and waters, declaring that she would have no schools, except here and there one that wealth might provide for the children of the wealthy and well-to-do citizen; her 50,000 children who were in attendance upon her public schools for the school years of 1883-84 turned out upon the streets and highways in indolence and vagabondage and tell me if you do not conjure up a state of society horrible to contemplate.

Florida, with her "God-given climate, generous soil, abundant and beautiful streams and lakes...abounding in golden fruits, garden farms, the silken fibre and the fruit of the vine...is attracting the attention of the people of all parts of our country and many parts of the world." These same people, he said, inquired first, in true Americanism, about the schools and church privileges. "Mark

me as I say," he went on, "those communities which present the best schools and the best church privileges will secure the best and the most-to-be-desired immigrant, and it will enjoy the very best condition of society."

The people, Russell claimed, were everywhere demanding public education, and "any man or set of men, or party that would deprive them of it would politically die in the day they attempted it." Were it possible, Russell said, with all his heart he would eliminate politics and party from school work, but unfortunately it was not. Both the Republican and the Democratic parties (the Alliance, a populist party "now walking up and down the state in skeleton shape," was dismissed) were pledged to a liberal system of public education. A comparison of the two parties, on the other hand, would show that "every interest of the people has been advanced--especially so in regard to the public schools" far better by the Democratic party. To the colored people whom he was glad to see and welcome that night, he spoke of how their schools had multiplied and greatly improved. Their own Stanton (one of the best Negro schools in the state, and after reconstruction probably the best) had improved tremendously, and Russell asked the group "Who was the first man to move with the members of your race to supply a principal of your own color?...He was a Democrat." (In a few years James Weldon Johnson, who received his elementary education at Stanton, would become principal.<sup>21</sup>) Russell then compared the records of the two

administrations. Under the Reconstruction Governor Marcellus Stearns, at the end of 1876, when "the death knell of Radicalism was rung out forever in Florida," there were only 676 public schools in the state, and most of these had been built by the Freedman's Bureau. At the close of the seventh year of Democratic rule, schools numbered 1,479; the number of students under Stearns was 28,444 and under Bloxham was 51,935. Financial support had almost doubled and one of two recently created normal schools was for colored teachers. Teachers' institutes had been held in seven counties with more planned. Under construction, due to the efforts of the current administration, was a Blind and Deaf-Mute Asylum for both white and colored. "And as the Democratic party is surely destined to continue in the administration of government in Florida , we may confidently expect greater advancement still."

In his conclusion, Russell invited

all true lovers of the State  
and common humanity to come and  
join our onward moving ranks,  
and lend a helping hand in  
winning a high place in the  
grand union of States for our  
Florida, allowing her to be  
second to none in her love for  
law and order, her honor and  
virtue, her reverence to God  
and His Holy Law, and her  
schools and the progress of  
her children.<sup>22</sup>

### Overview

The first six months of Russell's term and his two documented speeches reveal four key points that, when explicated, make understandable the successes of his administration and the vast gains made by free, public education in Florida.

First, Russell was a dedicated, enthusiastic administrator whose personality and "Silver-Tongued Orations" combined to make him an immensely popular person. He did not preside over his subordinates; rather he consistently went out amongst them visiting teachers, county officials, and their schools. Superintendent Sheats commented that Russell's greatest accomplishment was in "popularizing public education," and that he was "predisposed to congratulate and compliment everyone into good spirits and into his best effort, and to praise everything done, until the doer felt proud of his work."<sup>23</sup> That this was a quality unique to Russell seems evidenced by the lack of similar remarks regarding any other preceding superintendents. Russell's theme of "I am servant and brother" was repeated several times in the following eight years as the letterbooks show. That Russell believed he was a civil servant, willing to give of himself for the benefit of others is, in part, evidenced by his work as Superintendent of Sunday School in Jacksonville for some twenty years and by his deep religious conviction.<sup>24</sup> In

their countless tributes to him, both individuals and organizations said that beyond their respect and appreciation, either they "loved him" or that they had a deep emotional attachment to him. Yet the true secret to his success came from a complementary side of his personality. When necessary, he was willing to confront an adversary aggressively. Russell's editorial satire in his newspaper The Breeze, his 1880 report to Superintendent W.P. Haisley and Governor George F. Drew (when they attempted to consolidate educational revenue to common schools), and his insistence to superintendents that they "recognize my wishes and cooperate with me in these matters," in part, reveal this other side of his nature. Russell had been a soldier in war, and he was an officer in that war, accustomed to responsibility and giving orders. Governor Bloxham probably best summed up Russell's style when he once wrote that Russell was "mild in manner...fierce in fight."<sup>25</sup>

Albert J. Russell was more than an educator. In fact, another strength of Russell's was, as the History of Florida Education Association pointed out, that he was "himself never a teacher"<sup>26</sup> but was conspicuous over the state in a dozen different ways. As Sheats stated:

In the first place, he was a Confederate Veteran and, by virtue of this relation, had influence with the very element whose interests were so desirable to be enlisted; besides this, he was prominent in Sunday school, and church work, a highly honored Free Mason, Odd Fellow, Knight of Honor, temperance man in various



orders and with it all, an earnest, eloquent, magnetic speaker, who in his various offices had spoken from nearly every rostrum in the State, either upon politics or upon other popular subjects, in the discharge of some of his fraternal obligations.<sup>27</sup>

Russell's reputation continued to grow with each passing year, largely as a result of his speaking from "nearly every rostrum in the state," and many outside the state. His earnest, eloquent and magnetic style of delivery made him a popular and much sought after speaker. The positions from which he spoke also heightened his reputation. He spoke as a Democrat, as the head of a major fraternal organization, the Masons, as a cabinet officer and state official (though it cannot be documented, Russell probably dedicated more public buildings than any other Floridian even to date), and as a statesman speaking and writing articles about the virtues of Florida life.

Over the years, when thousands of people left speaking halls, county fairs, state holiday or memorial celebrations, they left aware that the man who had entertained them so well, to whom they felt so drawn to and whom they respected, just happened to be, as well, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

A second key point is that under Russell's administration, teaching made its most rapid gains toward becoming a profession. His many letters written during the first months in office concerning teacher institutions show the importance Russell attached to them. The letter to

Hamilton County Superintendent Reid on April 30 is especially significant because it contains the first mention of a grand institute. Institutes had been held before, but never had the state seen a "grand institute" where teachers from more than one county attended "to learn how to teach." Exactly two years from the day he began as State Superintendent this concept would materialize into the grandest institute of them all. On February 22, 1886, at the Florida Chautauqua in DeFuniak Springs, Russell assembled the first State Teachers Institute, which brought together 345 teachers and superintendents from all parts of Florida. At this Institute a State Teachers' Association was formed, also the first in the state.<sup>28</sup> The next year, as a result of a resolution passed by the State Teachers Association and promotion by Superintendent Russell, the state's first professional periodical, the Florida School Journal was published in September.<sup>29</sup>

A study of the contents of the surviving fragments of his speeches reveals important statements and reiterations of Russell's educational philosophy. His vision of an educational superstructure becomes the third key point to his special status as an educator. As a carpenter, architect, Free Mason, and staunch supporter of substantial and brick construction, Russell began, unconsciously perhaps, to conceive of an educational system as a building. In his dedication address to the Florida Agricultural College, Russell makes several of these allegorical

references. An educational infrastructure and a substantially constructed building are made of the same things.

If the lesson taught in the ceremony leads to substantiality in building, its beautiful symbolism will teach us still more important and beautiful lessons. It teaches us that in building up our life work, our moral and mental characters, we should be sure and lay the foundation true and steadfast. The superstructure should be carefully planned. The foundation should be integrity, fixedness of purpose and rectitude of life.

The allegory is continued later in the speech.

Even the institution of learning, whose walls you commence here today, will be the brighter as an intellectual luminary and become a center from which not only an intellectually cultivated, but a highly moral and pure citizenship shall radiate throughout our whole state.<sup>30</sup>

While the literary and allegorical allusions are interesting, it is possible that the allegory was important in helping Russell conceive of an even more impressive concept. The term superstructure was first used here. Two years later, in his Biennial Report of 1886, Russell urged the legislature to endorse industrial training in the public schools. (Industrial education was then a departure from the traditional methods of education whereby a "student" was educated either through apprenticeship or a school of "classical" curriculum. Industrial education would allow a carefully planned integration of the two extremes.) An

initial model, he suggested, could be located at "the site of the state college, to be connected with its operations."<sup>31</sup> The following year, in his 1887 Annual Report, he suggested this connection could become "the keystone of our educational superstructure."<sup>32</sup> This idea of a superstructure was first used at the dedication address of the Agricultural College. The concept of superstructure continued to grow as his philosophy and experiences merged into his final vision. Eventually, Russell's educational superstructure would be a system whose foundations remained moral development and integrity, but whose construction would also include a system of common, graded schools, leading to graded high schools, schools for the handicapped, and schools for reform of misguided youth (never realized), all of which would lead to a system of colleges and universities that would teach teachers, promote agricultural research and provide the highest branches of classical curriculum for the professions.

Besides his popular personality, his work toward professionalizing the business of teaching, and his educational philosophy of a superstructure, there is one final point that characterized Albert J. Russell and his administration. Russell believed deeply in the interrelationship between education and democracy, and it was this belief that inspired in him an almost evangelical zeal toward his goals of popularizing, professionalizing, and improving the quality of Florida education. His own

education in a Virginia free school, the experiences of Reconstruction and his "Education and Democracy" speech in Jacksonville combine to document this point.

Russell was born, raised and received his formal and apprenticeship education in Virginia. Distinct parallels can be drawn between Russell and Jeffersonian democracy and education just as distinct consequences can be drawn from Russell's experiences as a student there and at Anderson Seminary, Petersburg's experiment with free, charitable education.

Education was not a function of the government during its inception; the idea that it should be was slow to appear and develop. Whereas the true origins of any movement are almost always controversially determined, least controversial is that in early America public education's strongest supporter was Thomas Jefferson, and its early growth was in his native state of Virginia. Thomas Jefferson's social reform program, begun in Virginia before developing into a national movement, depended almost entirely on the existence of a well-educated populace. "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization," he once said, "it expects what never was and never will be."<sup>33</sup> Jefferson's reverence for public education, like Russell's, bordered almost on the evangelical. "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."<sup>34</sup> While in France, he once wrote to a former teacher,

"Preach, my dear sir, preach a crusade against ignorance; establish and improve the law for educating the common people."<sup>35</sup>

Virginia can be credited as the birthplace of public education for yet another reason. Imported from England, as was the Lancastrian method of teaching large numbers of students, the Sunday School movement began in Virginia. What connection the churches had with Sunday Schools was more with their charitable concern and less with religious training. Many were involved with both kinds of education, but the secular Sunday Schools were numerous and became established throughout all Southern States as well as the East.<sup>36</sup> However good the Sunday Schools were to those students who would not have had any other opportunity for education, they unfortunately reinforced and continued to keep alive the idea that free education was for the poor--that charity was the only method of funding public schools.

When Russell was but sixteen years of age, the Virginia legislature contemplated a plan to have a state superintendent, state support for schools through taxation, and provisions for teacher training. In the latter eighteenth fifties, before Russell came to Florida, the issues had turned to even more comprehensive reform. At the prompting of Governor Henry A. Wise, plans were introduced to eliminate completely the taint of charity from its public schools, to improve the coordination of elementary and

higher schools, and to encourage the creation of a teacher's association.<sup>37</sup> The Civil War as well as insubstantial public support for these proposals prevented them from becoming law, but at the least, Virginia was a most progressive leader among the states not only in state support of free, public education, but in the knowledge and experience of what was necessary to make a comprehensive educational system work.

Anderson Seminary, Petersburg's charity school, was proof, however, that even Jeffersonian zeal and Virginia's progressive spirit were not enough to legislate public attitude and financial support for free schools. In spite of Anderson Seminary's reputation for academic excellence, the odious taint of the poor school remained well beyond Russell's days as a student there. After his father's death, which may have necessitated his attending a charity school, his mother died. Once again Russell was placed into charitable hands, a guardian who sent him to apprenticeship training in Richmond. Without home or parents or any Petersburg friends besides his brother who accompanied him, Russell surely had time to contemplate his life as fate had given it to him.

When a life's work is summarized by a colleague, who said in effect that Russell's greatest achievement was in popularizing the unpopular, that he succeeded better than any other man in "arousing the popular mind to a proper appreciation of the public schools," and that he was "best

of all--an enthusiastic advocate of universal education at state expense," it begs the question, why? There is evidence that he did these things. There is evidence that how he did these things was through his "influence with the very element[s] whose interests were so desirable to be enlisted."<sup>38</sup> Yet there is no evidence to answer perhaps the most important question of Russell's life and his administration. Why would a man who was not trained as an educator become one of Florida's preeminent educators?

Childhood experiences often become lifetime memories. Attending a "poor school" or "charity school" can leave its mark on anyone. Russell's apprenticeship, a second experience at charitable education, this time after he was orphaned and away from home, could have also left its mark. Surviving documents reflect not only Russell's enthusiasm for promotion of schools at State expense, but an especial interest in eradicating their odious taint of charity.

In his 1880 report to the State Superintendent, Russell suggested that County Boards of Education "should be selected with regard to sound judgement, discretion, and more especially, their ideas of progress as contrasted with the prejudices heretofore existing in the South against what they, the people, were wont sneeringly to call the free schools."<sup>39</sup> This same report that he sent as Duval County Superintendent leaves no doubt regarding his attitude toward public education. Even when the public education had gained a foothold through popular and tax based support, it was not



enough for him. The proposed plan to limit support to the "mere elementary branches" so angered him that

I cannot contemplate it without disgust and displeasure. Again, the rich and large property holders are taxed to educate the poor and it would seem but simple equity that...they who bear the burdens mostly would have the opportunity of an advanced education without the additional expense of a Private School, especially so when at the same time it affords a like opportunity for the children of the poor who would never have the opportunity but for so munificent a plan.<sup>40</sup>

Russell's ultimate vision for an educational superstructure went beyond public support for free education. From the day he took office as State Superintendent he argued for the inclusion of industrial education into the classic curriculum. In his report to the governor in 1886 Russell claimed:

The professions are overflowing. The impractically educated man is to be seen in every neighborhood while the broad fields and useful trades, highly honorable and which, as American people we largely need, are loudly calling for our young men and women to enter them and pursue life in their channels.

Perhaps again recalling his own experiences when he learned architecture, Russell wrote:

The old manner of years past of apprenticeship to acquire a knowledge of these trades became so repugnant to both parents and youth, until it is now a rare thing to see a boy learning a trade as an apprentice,

and therefore we are not producing  
the artisans and mechanics our  
rapid growth and progress demands.

Since he had "dared to suggest the connection of this technical school with our State College," Russell then included portions of a commencement address by Emory College President Dr. A.G. Haygood delivered in June the same year. Haygood was rejecting the popular notion that "the highest culture is the chief end of a college." The theme of Haygood's remarks was to reject and refute a student's sneer toward an Emory technical school, which some had nicknamed "a blacksmith shop at Emory."

But his sneer is noteworthy  
because it is an echo. It  
gives semi-articulate voice  
to the bad sentiment so  
prevalent among our white people  
who can live without working  
with their hands--a sentiment  
that breeds discontent and a  
certain shame in those who  
labor with their hands.<sup>41</sup>

"Prejudice and falsehood" were also attacked in Russell's report of 1888, just as he continued attacking popular prejudices against free and industrial education throughout his administration.<sup>42</sup>

Out of Jefferson's Virginia, with its belief in democracy through education, came Russell into Florida. Out of his experiences as a charity school recipient came his championship of free public education. Out of his apprenticeship in architecture came his "repugnance" of apprenticeship and the prejudices against those who work with their hands. Russell also opposed the apprenticeship's

neglect of the arts, of rhetoric, of civic responsibilities and of development of a person's whole self.

His life experiences taught Russell one more thing that was crucial to a total understanding of his vision of an educational mission. As State Superintendent, Confederate Officer, Grand Master, Architect, Statesman and Silver-Tongued Orator of Florida who traveled the length and breadth of the state, education was more than something which produced a high culture for society; it was a necessity for society. Education was necessary for the successful operation of a representative government, and it was necessary to civilize and settle the still young and pioneering state of Florida.

In the fall of 1865, only a short time after Major Russell had returned from the war, with Jacksonville in ruins, recently appointed Governor William Marvin stood under the shade of a grove of trees in Tallahassee and addressed the situation as it was then.

When the rebellion failed--for as such as it will go into history--by the surrender of the Confederate armies, our State Government, which had been identified with it, and supported it, also went down a ruin among the general ruin which overwhelmed the States of the South. Florida was then without a government of any kind, and remained in that condition of anarchy and confusion for a few days, till the U.S. Government extended over the state martial law, and such is our status at present.<sup>43</sup>

The anarchy lasted not a "few days" but for eleven years. In 1877 Reconstruction ended, and power was returned to white Floridians, and the Democratic party. But besides the economic devastation, the sluggish economy and agricultural system which was its main support, and even besides the animosities, general confusion, and humiliation, it was a far different Florida than it was before the war. Firstly, freedmen had the vote. Politically, this meant that in 1865 close to half of the state's population was illiterate and politically naive. (This percentage does not include, of course, the considerable thousands of whites who were illiterate.) When Russell assumed office in 1884, education for the Negro had made substantial progress, but the "dual system" was filled with inequities and much more progress was needed.

In 1884 the United States was on the verge of scientific and agricultural revolution. The first Morrill Act of 1862 had played a key role in the revolution entering academics, especially higher education.<sup>44</sup> The Hatch Experiment Station Act of 1887, in part, caused the formation of the Association of Land Grant Colleges and mobilized agriculture and research interests to the point Congress began passing legislation increasingly favorable to these interests.<sup>45</sup> Russell was all too aware of the revolution in agriculture research just as he was aware of Florida's vast potential to take advantage of it. But in speeches, newspaper articles, and editorial comments he

warned of Florida's unpreparedness to exploit these advantages. His dedication address at the Agricultural College made specific reference to Florida's "race with her sister states."<sup>46</sup> Again in his "Education and Democracy" speech in Jacksonville, Russell repeated the idea of the race, and the urgency by which Florida needed to respond. There was he said, a "race between the States as to which shall be superior in strength, wealth, intellect and social standing."<sup>47</sup>

Especially in "Education and Democracy" did Russell stress the vast, untapped resources of Florida, that education was necessary to tap them, and that politics could not be eliminated from the process. Russell was a politician. He was a Democrat. But better than political Democrat would Southern Democrat or even Florida Democrat describe him. During Reconstruction the choice was simple. One could be a Democrat or one could be a Republican and be aligned with "the evil import." There is no record of Russell speaking of the glories of the Democratic party outside of this context. True, he rejected the Alliance party, and the populists, but only because of his loyalty and his long standing commitment of some twenty-five years with the party, and his position as Cabinet member to three Democratic governors. Bloxham started Russell's long term position as cabinet member, and Bloxham's attitude and public position on the advancement of education made him a strong ally. After all, besides appointing Albert J.

Russell as State Superintendent, it was William D. Bloxham who had said in his annual gubernatorial address a year earlier, "There is no subject more important than popular education. Universal suffrage demands universal education as its protector, for while the ballot is a most potent weapon, when wielded by ignorance, there is none more dangerous to free government."<sup>48</sup>

Both William Bloxham and Albert J. Russell went throughout the state spreading exactly that message, especially and more specifically, of course, Albert J. Russell. No better statement expresses their alliance, and no quote better expresses the relationship Russell saw between education and democracy.

Albert J. Russell accomplished more for Florida's free, public education than any person before him because he was an effective administrator who was loved or at least respected by his subordinates, and immensely popular throughout the state as a person and as a "Silver-Tongued Orator." Education gained strength and depth by Russell's achievements in making teaching a profession. Russell's vision of an educational superstructure was so totally comprehensive a system of education that the state has not yet (by neglect of industrial education and reformatory schools) caught up to it. His childhood experiences in near Jeffersonian education, through charity and apprenticeship schools, and the experiences taught him by Reconstruction made him a passionate supporter of free, public education.

Finally, Russell was no mere theoretical visionary, but a visionary equipped with the political skills and following to make the vision into a nearly completed reality before he died.

### The Emergence of Professionalism in Florida Education

In his first Biennial report to the governor in 1884, Russell wrote that meetings for the purpose of teaching teachers how to teach were difficult to come by. It was especially difficult to hold joint institutes, drawing teachers in from several counties, because of the lack of transportation and the costs involved. Besides these obstacles, the motivation for attending was not very high since most teachers misunderstood the purpose of the institutes.

The poverty of most teachers, the inconvenience of travel and strange impression that these Institutes were to be places and times of severe test and examination, rather than opportunities of aid and instruction, had kept many away.<sup>49</sup>

Between February 1884 and February 1886, Russell attempted to dispel much of the apprehension teachers had by hiring three good instructors and by personally attending all institutes himself. Russell furthered this cause by organizing two normal schools for Colored teachers (one in Gainesville, of which William N. Sheats was principal; and

the other in Tallahassee) and by attending and frequently lecturing to the classes.<sup>50</sup>

Beginning in March 1885, Russell organized meetings between himself and teachers in twenty-two counties and held institutes in seventeen of them. According to Russell "four hundred and ninety-seven teachers were brought under the influence of instruction of instructors whose life work it had been to prepare the mind for the great work of teaching the youth of our land." He and his team of instructors attempted "intensely practical" institutes filled with discussion, and "new and approved methods of instruction." Some institutes were even attended by parents and other citizens. Russell said that he "was present at each of these institutes, doing all in my power to add interest and influence their influence for good."<sup>51</sup>

Evidently, by 1886 apprehension felt by most teachers had dissipated because a most successful grand institute, Florida's very first State Teachers' Institute, was held in February and March in DeFuniak Springs.

In February 1886, through the enterprise and liberality of the Florida Chautauqua at DeFuniak Springs and every railway and line of steamers in the State, I was enabled to assemble the first State teachers institute and the first convention of county superintendents ever held in the State.<sup>52</sup>

The success of the first State Institute was unquestionably assisted by the workers and shapers of the Florida Chautauqua Association. The Florida Chautauqua,



modeled after the New York Chataugua, was originally a massive gathering of people, often under a canvas tent to hear lectures and see demonstrations of intellectual and scientific achievement. Especially in their early days, Chautauquas were traveling educational fairs, offering non-credit courses in a country campground setting. Good food and good fun were also plentiful.<sup>53</sup> One of the directors was Col. W.D. Chipley, president of the Pensacola and Atlantic Railway.<sup>54</sup> DeFuniak Springs, site of the Chautauqua, was located next to the major southernmost east-west railroad line which ran from Jacksonville to New Orleans. Col. Chipley and Russell exchanged correspondence about six months prior to the Chautauqua, and had agreed to a rate of one-half cent per mile for teachers attending the Institute.<sup>55</sup> (Russell reported that he was almost always able to garner a fifty-percent reduction in travel fees for school work.) Rates for housing were also set "at a very low figure," the generosity of the Chautauqua Association. As if to finalize the ease by which teachers could afford the retreat, Russell quoted Section 30 of the State Constitution which stated no teacher's salary would be reduced while attending an institute or teacher's meeting.

With reduced costs and ease of transportation, the promotion by the Association of DeFuniak Springs, and the reputation of the Chautauqua itself helped make the Institute an attractive package. The first brochure capitalized on Florida's "land of flowers" image, but for

the Florida teachers, all too well aware of the other Florida, the Association promised "relief from the summer heats, and press of care, amid the groves about Chautauqua Lake," where "malaria and mosquitoes are entirely unknown quantities."<sup>56</sup>

Amid the other on-going activities of the Chautauqua, the Institute was "supplied with lecturers from among the foremost in the Country both male and female, and the entire time during the forenoon of each day for one week was freely surrendered to the Institute."<sup>57</sup> Spirits were evidently so high there was talk of creating a "Russell Park" in which each county would erect a cottage for teachers attending institutes.<sup>58</sup>

The most important event to happen as a result of the first State Institute in DeFuniak Springs was the creation of the Florida State Teachers' Association on March 4, 1886. The Chautauqua had intended for the teachers to establish an annual teachers' institute in connection with the Chautauqua, but by unanimous decision, a state teachers' association was voted upon with J.A. Graham of Key West as president.<sup>59</sup> There is no evidence to document exactly how distinct from the Chautauqua Association the teachers wanted to be, or if indeed there was at the time any reason to attempt autonomy. The Chautauqua Association had made every effort to provide the best possible academic and educational environment, at low cost and in a resort-like atmosphere.

Two things happened, however, that clarified the distinctiveness of the teachers from the Chautauqua. Evidently the sense of professionalism was strong among the ranks of some of the teachers. At the second State Institute in DeFuniak Springs in February, 1887, teachers were no longer completely enamored with the "intellectual athletes" and "moral heroes" provided by the management.<sup>60</sup> In the opening session of the Florida State Teachers' Institute Russell urged the teachers "to unite in this organization, to sympathize with each other, and to encourage each other in this mighty battle of ignorance." W.J. Bordon of Oxford introduced a resolution, which was approved, that the next meeting time be selected "when there will be no other assemblages in session."<sup>61</sup> At the following year's opening session, while Russell was asking for "hearty support" for the Florida School Journal, noise from adjoining crowds filling the main Tabernacle caused the teachers to adjourn until the next day.<sup>62</sup> By the following year, the name Florida State Teachers' Institute was completely abandoned and was replaced by the Florida State Teachers' Association. The Chautauqua went on for another thirty-seven years, but after 1889 the Florida State Teachers' Association was no longer associated with the Florida Chautauqua.<sup>63</sup>

The most dramatic signs of professional development were seen at the second Institute in 1887. At this session, besides the resolution to meet away from other Chautauqua

assemblages, there were attempts made to influence school legislation. There were resolutions made to mandate compulsory school attendance and attendance of teachers at county institutes.<sup>64</sup> Also, there was a resolution introduced by H. Merz of Lake City, to "establish at once a teachers' journal...to be the official organ of this association." The executive Committee approved the plan to publish a journal as soon as \$500 could be raised for the venture.<sup>65</sup>

As a result, six months later, Florida's first professional periodical was published in Lake City, The Florida School Journal. Superintendent Russell wrote the opening salutation of which the following is a part:

It has been one of the great needs of our State that the teachers and school officers should have a journal through the columns of which they might have an opportunity of expressing themselves, discussing methods, discipline and school management as applied to the circumstances surrounding the schools in Florida; for it is true the local conditions, circumstances and temperaments of a city, county or State vary these as the case may be. To ask questions of each other as to personal experience, and compare notes of observations made. To discuss means which may be used to advance the standard of school work, as well as the interests of the profession.<sup>66</sup>

Editor H. Merz then announced that the monthly paper would be devoted to the advancement of the educational

interests of Florida. Specifically:

1. To establish a means of communication between Superintendents, officers and teachers.
2. To furnish teachers the best educational literature.
3. To promote morality as well as the acquisition of knowledge.
4. To establish and foster county institutes in every county.
5. To raise the standard of the profession.<sup>67</sup>

The first publication was a most praiseworthy edition. Inside its twenty pages were addresses by the State Superintendent and its editor, the minutes of the second meeting of the second Florida State Teachers' Association in DeFuniak Springs, lengthy reports on Florida Normal School organization by both H.N. Felkel and Russell, an argument for longer school terms, reports from several county superintendents, "General News, Editorials and Gleanings, Personals" and "Florida News." The editorials promised good things were happening for Florida education and that there were more to come.<sup>68</sup>

The records of these early activities, of the first and second Teachers' Institutes, of the first and second meetings of the Florida Teachers' Association, of the publication of The Florida School Journal, document what could be described as the first records of an emerging professionalism among the ranks of Florida teachers. In many respects Florida was pulling ahead of her sister states in public education. Certainly Florida had a better developed dual system of education; more Negroes were going

to school and getting a better education than elsewhere in the nation.<sup>69</sup> And Georgia, for example, had made three attempts without success to publish a professional educational journal.<sup>70</sup> But the growth of professionalism in Florida education cannot be characterized as an explosive ground-swell of interests and demands by its teachers. Indeed, there was much apathy and even some active teacher opposition to institutes and the first educational journal. After the fanfare and festivities of the first State Teachers' Institute at the second annual Florida Chautauqua, after the organizing, adopting of a constitution and electing of officers, membership of the Florida State Teachers' Association stood at only nineteen. The following year the Institute, which drew some 300 participants, managed to enlist twenty-six more members for a total of forty-seven.<sup>71</sup> "Why?" cried the Journal's editor.

Forty-seven members out of about fourteen hundred teachers! There must be some serious reasons for the lack of interest exhibited on the part of teachers toward an organization which has for its aim the highest goal of its members and of the educational interests of the state.<sup>72</sup>

Many teachers were strongly opposed to attending institutes, especially outside their county. According to one angry teacher:

If the railroads would give free passes to and from the place of meeting of the Teacher's Institute, the teachers might manage to attend, but as many do not receive over twenty dollars a month

and pay their board out of that sum, it does not leave a very wide margin to travel upon and pay for shoe leather.

I would be glad if someone would stir up the people...against the abominable system of paying teachers by the average school attendance, which places every teacher at the mercy of precocious manikins whose parents are little if any better judges of a worthy teacher than their progeny.

Still, regardless of apathy and opposition, out of the first State Institute came the birth of Florida's first statewide teacher organization and its first professional journal. Participation in an organization of mutually interested teachers expanded; and the angry and frustrated teachers now had an organization to complain to, and a journal in which they could voice their complaints. Russell's contributions to this effect were acknowledged in several lengthy tributes in the Florida Teacher, the state's second professional journal.<sup>73</sup> And today, the Florida Education Association recognizes Albert J. Russell as "the Father of the F.E.A.,"<sup>74</sup> the man who first made possible one collective voice of Florida educators. Things had not completely changed for Florida education, but things were changing. For Albert J. Russell, a new day had come, and he was glad to report as he did in his 1886 report to Governor Perry:

The day for the 'old school master with his green spectacles and buckhorn handled cane and birchen rod' has passed, and the day for real teachers has come.<sup>75</sup>

### Higher Education

George Gary Bush, who published the first history of Florida Education, originally set out to write a history of the state's higher educational system. What Bush found instead, and what caused him to alter his whole perspective on the subject was that in Florida:

More than in most other states is the history of higher education intertwined with that of the secondary and common schools, and very unsuccessful, as it appears to the writer, would be the attempt at the present time to write a history of the first which should not include a history of all.<sup>76</sup>

When the United States Commissioner of Education, N.H.R. Dawson, wrote the recommendation of Bush's study to the Secretary of the Interior, he said:

During the past five years [1884-89] nothing has done as much to elevate the standard of education in Florida as the efficient aid rendered by teachers' institutes and normal schools.<sup>77</sup>

These two observations from the best and most succinct explanation of the unique feature of Florida higher education: that the roots of Florida higher education were in its teacher institutes and normal schools. It could be argued that this was more than happenstance, and it could be argued equally--our indebtedness to A.J. Russell's great institutes.



College in Lake City, Superintendent Albert J. Russell remains prominent in the development of Florida higher education.

Teacher education was the number one legislative priority when Tallahassee first expressed interest in higher education. The origination of the East and West Florida Seminaries (today's University of Florida and Florida State University) was largely the work of Owen M. Avery, who served as a chairman of the Senate Committee on Schools and Colleges in 1850. Avery recognized that the success of common schools depended on well-qualified teachers, so his committee recommended a bill to establish two state seminaries, one east and one west of the Suwannee River. Governor Thomas Brown signed the bill into law on January 24, 1851. The committee's report stated that "the first purpose of these two Seminaries shall be the instruction of persons both male and female, in the art of teaching all the various branches that pertain to a good Common School education." Its second mission, besides imparting skills and knowledge in "mechanic arts, husbandry and agricultural chemistry" was enabling students to understand the state's political governmental system, its "fundamental laws, and in what regards the rights and duties of citizens."<sup>78</sup>

Viewed collectively, these two missions underscore profoundly important relationships that this and ensuing legislatures saw between schools and government, and between schools and their teachers. To this extent, Florida's

emerging system of higher education followed the trend set by the rest of the country. According to Brubacher and Rudy's Higher Education in Transition, internationally, before 1900 there were three primary functions of higher education leading to our modern concept of the university. One of them was distinctly American.

To the English concept of the general culture of the educated gentleman and the German concept of scholarly research for its own sake, the American university added another dimension; namely that higher education to justify its own existence should seek to serve actively in the basic needs of American life.<sup>79</sup>

Even though those needs were diverse (which led to William Rainey Harper's "multiversity" in 1905, and to today's vast, sprawling unregimented and dissimilar system of higher education), its multiplicity of needs were bound by their common denominator: service to the community. Across the country, even young America had developed to the extent its systems of higher education provided many services to the community, namely a higher culture for society, medical schools, law schools, professional schools, and normal schools. In 1885 Florida, land of flowers, snakes and alligators, with largely untapped natural resources, and lack of transportation higher education's mission was not so diverse. The number one characteristic of the developing system of education in Florida was its recognition of the interdependency of education and democracy, and its respect for the ballot. In 1883, a year before he appointed Russell

State Superintendent, Governor Bloxham's annual message referred to the vote as "a most potent weapon" and "when wielded by ignorance, none the more dangerous to free government."<sup>80</sup>

Florida at this time was experiencing phenomenal growth in its population and, in large measure due to the contributions of Major Russell, a phenomenal growth in the popularity and acceptance of the free, public school system. Between the years 1884 and 1886 for example, the number of Florida public schools increased by 415.<sup>81</sup> According to Pyburn, "the growth of the common schools and the improvement of their various phases created a demand for a greater number of teachers. Thus, teacher...training was one of the chief reasons why there followed the development and expansions of higher learning."<sup>82</sup> In other words, democracy through education of the populace necessitated teacher training through an emerging system of higher education dedicated to that end.

The two seminaries created by Avery and the 1851 legislature never developed, until decades later, into much more than common schools, then high schools, and never very distinguished ones at that. Many Florida histories, especially educational histories, can be misleading in their treatment of higher educational growth and development. Legislative bills and aims were so well-intended and proliferous that a documented history of thirty or forty years of them makes it appear as if there was a great deal

of progress. Yet the East Florida Seminary, for example, legislatively established in 1851, was in 1883 only "a school not a college".<sup>83</sup> And up until 1884 the school was housed in one drafty, leaking wooden building whose superintendent claimed was "badly designed and poorly constructed." In 1883 only five students graduated and in 1884 there was only one.<sup>84</sup> By 1880, the two seminaries had attracted no students outside their own counties, and this fact prompted State Superintendent Haisely's sharpest criticism.

Failing to attract students from all portions of the State as was provided for by law, the boards of trustees who managed the institutions...converted them into ordinary high schools.<sup>85</sup>

By 1884, the normal departments were accounting for substantial increase in enrollments, especially for special sessions of normal instruction.<sup>86</sup> In his 1886 report, Russell reported that as a result of appropriations by the legislature, both seminaries were well organized and had Normal School Departments.

Normal Schools were also organized and conducted for colored teachers in Gainesville and Tallahassee. In 1887 permanent normal colleges were established in DeFuniak Springs for white teachers and in Tallahassee for colored. Clearly, higher education had its roots in teacher institutes and in its Normal departments and schools. Service to the community, a most distinctive characteristic of American higher education, was never better exemplified

than it was in teacher education in Florida. Russell's desire to raise the quality of Florida education became his increasing drive during the nine years of his administration. His very first actions toward that goal began with teacher institutes and normal education.

### University of Florida

(East Florida Seminary and Florida Agricultural College)

Higher education's indebtedness to Albert J. Russell is made even more manifest when it is recognized how his contributions made possible the eventual emergence of the University of Florida as the pre-eminent university in the state. Because his name is often conspicuously absent in the historical records of the University's "evolution," historians have continued this pattern of neglect. Outside of establishing the date of origination as 1851, most historians of the University begin with the merger between the Agricultural College at Lake City and the East Florida Seminary in Gainesville.<sup>87</sup> What these histories have failed to recognize is why the merger proved so fruitful, and why the West Florida Seminary, now Florida State University, was unsuccessful in establishing pre-eminence. Tracing the histories of the East and West Seminaries beyond contemporary studies can document Albert J. Russell's significance. This is not to say Russell singled out today's University of Florida for advancement, nor did he

neglect the Tallahassee institution; rather it was his contributions toward furthering the aims of Florida education in general and Florida higher education in particular that allowed the evolutionary forces to develop the way they did. This is not to say as well, that Albert J. Russell is the most important person in the University's history, but when true historical recognition is given those most responsible for its success, Albert J. Russell should be among the most prominent of names.

As has been determined earlier, in order to justify its own existence, American higher education had to serve the needs of its community. The greater the service, and the greater number of services, therefore, the more important to the community the institution became. The road to academic fame, in other words, is paved with stones of community service.

Ironically, the West Florida Seminary began with a much better foundation and was, as a consequence, more aggressive academically than its companion seminary in Gainesville. Although legislatively authorized as a package in 1851, the West Florida Seminary was put into abeyance for several years. The trustees of the Florida Institute, owned by the city of Tallahassee, approached the legislature in 1856 and offered its institution, and \$2,000 annually for Tallahassee students' tuition, as an inducement for the West Florida Seminary's location in Tallahassee. West Florida Seminary then, began with more liquid assets, more acreage, and a

more solidly constructed building, it being a two-story, brick building, appraised at about \$10,000. Then in 1858, the Seminary merged with the Leon Female Academy, again increasing its assets.<sup>88</sup> Although both East and West Seminaries failed to attract students outside their respective counties, as was part of their mission, by 1880 the West Seminary began a serious program to raise standards.<sup>89</sup> This program of reform was helped by the creation of normal departments in 1883.<sup>90</sup> Though not entirely as a direct result of the added program and revenue, also in 1883 academic buildings were enlarged, new furniture was bought and more faculty were hired. By the mid 1880's, its academic standards were so high, and its attempt to create two bachelor's degree programs was so successful, the West Florida Seminary was the best and first true public institution of higher learning in the state. In fact, in 1885 the legislature recognized it "as the University of the State and to be known as the University of Florida."<sup>91</sup> By 1887-88 attendance increased by fifty percent over the prior year. The 1888 catalogue told the story of its achievements.

In the collegiate department two courses are taught,--the classical course, leading to the Bachelor of arts (B.A.), and the literary course, leading to the Bachelor of letters (B.Let.). Candidates for admission into the seminary must be well grounded in the branches usually embraced in the highest grade of the common schools...it is the desire of

the board of education to confine the teaching, as far as possible, to high schools and collegiate courses.<sup>92</sup>

However excellent its academic appearance, the West Florida Seminary began making a fundamental mistake. Success with its classic and literary curriculum caused the "university" to shun full community service functions such as teacher education, and to ignore the new wave of interest in industrial education and agricultural research.

In 1886 the legislature discontinued normal department appropriations. As a consequence, West Florida Seminary's new president George M. Edgar discontinued its normal program. Two prejudices are revealed--against "technical" and teacher education--in an 1887 report Edgar made to Superintendent Russell.

After a careful examination into the condition of the seminary it seemed to me that the institution was neither subserving the main purpose for which it was established, nor was it, in a proper sense organized upon a 'collegiate basis'...It appears from the secretary's books that the annuity of the institution had never been adequate to provide for efficient technical instruction in the mechanic arts and husbandry and that instruction in pedagogics had only been maintained by legislative appropriations which the last legislature discontinued.<sup>93</sup>

This decision to eliminate Florida's first higher educational emphasis from the curriculum at West Florida Seminary (also encouraged by the recently raised requirements for admission), may have enhanced the liberal



arts baccalaureate programs, but it decreased its community service functions by one, the number one service needed in Florida. Dropping "technical instruction in the mechanic arts and husbandry" decreased its community service even more. Becoming increasingly aloof, superior and distant, the West Florida Seminary began a period of isolation from the dynamics of the growing system of public education and the agricultural revolution clearly visible practically everywhere else in the nation.

Russell's vision for a comprehensive educational system, a system necessary to protect democracy and settle the state, probably would never have tolerated this aloofness except for two things. By then there were two operating Normal Colleges training teachers, one in DeFuniak Springs for whites, and the other in Tallahassee for colored. Then too, however pleased Russell had been about the progress of the two seminaries, and their normal departments, in his 1886 report he added that the seminaries lacked facilities available to students in normal schools.<sup>94</sup> Teacher training could go on, he figured without West Florida Seminary. There was yet a second reason Russell could allow the University's aloofness. Something else was already much closer to his heart. This something was much closer to his vision of an educational superstructure and he adopted it as his personal mission. Other than teacher institutes, nothing captured Russell's attention and energies more than the Florida Agricultural College at Lake

City, whose dedication address he had delivered in his first official act as State Superintendent of Public Instruction back on February 22, 1884. The Agricultural College was, to Russell, the keystone of his educational vision for a free, comprehensive system of public education. In it lay the hopes for the future of Florida. In it was the "center from which an illuminary shall radiate upon our whole State." Major Russell, as a member of the defeated Confederacy, having only recently finished his work as "the leading contractor in restoring the waste places of Jacksonville after the war," saw the College as a symbol of the "New South."<sup>95</sup> It was the College that allowed his "beloved South," whose "bedraggled robes, lying in the dust of humiliation," to throw "her sorrows to the winds and bend all her energies on the achievement of the new South." In it, as he wrote in September of that year to newspaper editors around the state, "the young men of this State can obtain a thorough classical education and at the same time a thorough theoretical knowledge of agriculture and fruit growing."<sup>96</sup>

Russell's enthusiasm for the Agricultural College, however, was not shared by everyone. Nationally, the birth of land-grant colleges had to face apathy, even hostility from the great mass of American farmers who wanted little more than trade schools.<sup>97</sup> Then there were those who saw industrial education institutions as being beneath the intellectual and cultural requirements of the classical

curriculum. Even in Florida the Agricultural College faced hostility.

In 1880 State Superintendent Haisley argued against its creation. On the one hand he wanted all monies to go to the common school fund, and on the other hand, he believed the school served little need and was too expensive.

My views are decidedly opposed to any effort being made to establish an agricultural college--few students have been induced to attend these institutions--the general verdict in regard to them is that their benefit to agriculture is not commensurate with the large sums of money expended on them. President McCosh of Princeton College says: "I could show that in no country in the world has agriculture been much benefited from mere agricultural schools."<sup>98</sup>

In his 1881-82 Bi-Ennial Report Superintendent Foster had nothing to say regarding the Agricultural College except to record the funds in holding,<sup>99</sup> and in his 1883 and final report he ignored the College altogether.<sup>100</sup> In a letter to his wife, Ashley D. Hurt, first president of the College, wrote that the College was simply

a big mistake, and the result will be that the Ag. College of Florida will be absolutely nothing. I know I am in a swamped boat, but it is too late to do anything but try to get to land. The trouble is, there is no money for the college to draw on, and I'm afraid the legislature will not appropriate any. The different sections of the state hate each other like the Devil and the day is distant when one section will vote an appropriation which will benefit another.<sup>101</sup>

But Russell's stature as statesman and educator and visionary continued to rise above other perceptions that the college would "come to nothing." Lack of money and prejudices against manual training could be overcome by the needs served by the college. In an article he wrote entitled "Possibilities of Florida," Russell outlined the benefits of manufacturing, processing and cultivating dozens of the state's natural resources--cotton, hardwoods, lumber including cypress, sugar cane, rice, palmetto leaves, hides, wild jute, vegetables--all of which were being shipped out of the state for processing.

In many ways the people of the South, as in long-life habit are paying out money every day enriching other States and impoverishing our own, in purchasing articles for necessity, instead of receiving money in return for our raw materials prepared for the machinery of the manufacturer.<sup>102</sup>

In an 1887 Florida School Journal piece, Russell opened by saying he had been asked many times an all important question: "How can industrial training or teaching be done in the public schools without a special organization for that particular purpose?" Russell replied to that question because he realized "the vast importance of the work, and its great value to the youth of our whole country, and especially in the South and to Florida." Then he established clearly that students should not be "taught trades;...but that they be taught principles involved in them; a knowledge of the use of tools, implements and forces used in them." No one, he argued, could fail to see the importance of such teaching when "seven-tenths of the

pupils in our schools are the children of artisans, mechanics and laborers of the country and State."

It is a fact there is a vast amount of impractical education done in this country. In every city, town or hamlet, men can be found who are cultured in the dead languages, in the letter of natural philosophy and the higher mathematics, who if thrust out by necessity, disaster or Providence into the practical, busy, pushing world, are utterly incapable of applying to practical purposes what they know.

The impracticality of the classic curriculum was evidenced everywhere, Russell argued. Exactly as he did in his 1886 report, Russell reported that everywhere "the professions are overflowing." The "deserted field" becomes a motif in several of his speeches, reports and this Journal article:

The field and farm are deserted by thousands of stalwart young men--alas! that it should be so--who flock to towns and cities, and who are so unfitted to enter manufactories and workshops or other places of industrial art and therefore are driven to accept any temporary employment, however unsuitable in character or profit, and the result is frequently moral disaster.<sup>103</sup>

However clear his argument, however apparent the logistics of which Russell spoke, there was yet another element that combined to make Russell unique in his effectiveness as a spokesman for the Agricultural College and industrial education. Russell had been, by all accounts, an excellent student. He knew literature; his rhetoric was among the best in the South.

He could cite current events, history, and the Bible in a way that allowed a thousand people at the same time see the logic, the parallels, and a sense of things beyond themselves. His academic standards were among the highest in the state, and yet Russell was a different educator, statesman than most. He was also a carpenter, architect, ship joiner who had known how to work with his hands. In his "Possibilities of Florida" article Russell told how he, with the aid of only one laborer, had grown a stadium-sized field of rice "which took the premium of Atlanta during the Exposition held there in 1887, and it was pronounced magnificent by all who saw it who were capable of judging."<sup>104</sup> In his Journal article about the importance of teaching the principles of tools and manual arts, Russell discussed several tools and the principles involved with them. An extended excerpt of only one of them shows more than the importance of tools and the inclined plane, and that he knew how to work with his own hands. It shows, as well, that inside the State Superintendent of Public Schools, there was a poet.

The screwnail, used so extensively in carpentry and cabinet work, cuts its way into the wood by its own screw thread, the point of the gimlet-screw likewise, and of the auger and auger-bits. Take the auger as an illustration, the screw-bit taking hold upon the grain of wood draws the cutters or planes of the auger down upon the surface of the wood, cuts away the substance just as thick as the downward tendency of the screw-bit is, while the screw shaped band of auger is of an upward tendency and bears the chips made by the cutting planes at the bottom of the band of the auger, out of the bore made, and thus prevents the clogging or scotching of the cutting planes until at last we have the timber bored through, or as deep as we may desire. Thus in the simple use of the auger we have the principle of the

incline[d] plane both as to the straight upward grade and in the form of the screw and the wedge-shaped cutter. Now, the teacher having each tool in hand may explain how the principle of the incline[d] plane enters not only in the raising of weights and adjusting them to higher positions, but also in the division of solid bodies as of wood, stone or metal, the bit of the plane, the chisel and the gouge. The saw is but a system of incline[d] planes; the axe, the hatchet also, some of these are single incline[d] planes, and the plane-bit, the chisel, the gouge and the cutter at the end of the auger-band. Some are double incline[d] planes, as the axe, the saw, the hatchet, and the wedge.

By the end of this section, the plow has been added to the list of the things made possible by the inclined plane.

Here the teacher will have an admirable opportunity to impart wholesome lessons which will neer be forgotten...the plow, the point being the cutting plane, separating the soil and cutting asunder the roots which infest the ground, and the shovel being the curved incline[d] plane receiving the moving soil as the cutter is drawn through it, and by its curved relation to the straight or curving point, turning over the sod and exposing the roots of weeds and grass to kill them when they are rapidly converted into fertilizer to enrich the soil for a coming crop.<sup>105</sup>

The poet William Blake wrote that "all the world is in a grain of sand," and here in effect was Albert J. Russell saying all of the world is an inclined plane. The inclined plane was everywhere around them, he argued. Life as they knew it was made possible by the inclined plane. Its principle belonged in the schools; its principle needed to be added to the classic curriculum. Twenty years later, John Dewey revolutionized American education with the same idea, that education should have practical application.

In its first catalogue, published in June 1886, the mission of the Florida Agricultural College at Lake City is revealed.

The trustees...have founded a school in which liberal culture and practical education shall proceed together--a school in which the arts and sciences shall be thoroughly taught and diligently studied in their theoretical as well as their applied forms. Florida has not heretofore had within her borders a college in which to educate her youth, and has entrusted to distant States a work which is her own duty to perform.<sup>106</sup>

The catalogue's opening statement is more than a perfect expression of the ideals of the College. To trustee, State Superintendent and Statesman Albert J. Russell, it was the keystone of the educational superstructure. It was the state's greatest service oriented industry, its greatest democratizing agent.

Undoubtedly the Agricultural College was helped vastly by the Hatch Act of 1887 and then the second Morrill Act of 1890. Federal money to a characteristically frugal state legislature had its own impact. But state prejudices had to be overcome: the different sections who "hated each other like the Devil" had to be made to see their mutual gain. Floridians had to agree to send their sons to Lake City where "their sons may be educated at home without the danger of exposure in the rigorous climates of severe winters, to schools which prove no better and are certain to cost more."<sup>107</sup> In a letter to the editor of the Times-Union



Russell reported he had been to "every nook and corner of the state with my detailed descriptions and exhortations" of the benefits offered by the College.<sup>108</sup>

Superintendent Russell was a frequent visitor to the campus. He attended all graduation exercises and handed out all diplomas. There is evidence he got along well with all its presidents and especially so with the last during Russell's administration, F.L. Kern. Kern had had long experience as president of a normal and "scientific school" in Iowa, Illinois and Michigan. His and Russell's philosophy toward the necessity of a practical side to education were exactly alike. Also, Kern became editor and publisher of another of Russell's favorite causes, The Florida School Journal.<sup>109</sup>

A few years after Russell's death, the 1903 legislature acted upon a bill to change the name of the Agricultural College. The College, as Russell had predicted almost twenty years earlier, had become not only an intellectual luminary, but a college that served a tremendous need in the state. It had become the keystone of the state's comprehensive public educational system. In 1903, it became the University of Florida.

In his last report to the governor in 1892, Russell wrote of his college:

This College opened the year  
with a large attendance of the  
best young men in the State,  
strong in physique, and bright  
in mind, of excellent morals.  
The year promises the best results

attained in its short history.  
The people of Florida may rest  
upon the knowledge that they  
have a college in their midst  
in which their sons may receive a  
full literary and practical  
education.

### The Educational Superstructure

For years after Russell left for Tallahassee the only real high school in Florida was Duval High School in Jacksonville.<sup>110</sup> In 1884 Florida's only graded high school was limited to only three years of study before in 1888 State Superintendent Russell persuaded the Duval School Board to add the fourth year.<sup>111</sup> When this happened, it meant that not until 1889 was it possible to attend school according to a system that today almost everyone takes for granted. The 1889 graduation class was the first in Florida to have attended eight years of common school classes, and four years of high school, and then had the choice of going on into a state university for a baccalaureate or technical degree, all arranged for and all paid for by the State of Florida. A coincidence perhaps, but it was also in that same year that a bill framed by State Superintendent Russell was made into law. Referred to for years as "the New School Law," the School Law of 1889 did a lot of things for State education, but perhaps no written work has expressed these things more succinctly than an inscription on his tombstone:

He Gave To Florida Its  
Real Public School System

Baccalaureate degrees, and the systems of higher education to award them, were not new or even novel ideas to the well-educated in Florida. But a novel and unnecessary idea to most Floridians was what was necessary to prepare students for the collegiate curriculum, namely high schools. Beyond selling the importance of education and the idea of providing that education free to all youth, Russell now had a new challenge. The next important phase of the educational superstructure called for schools to prepare students for college or for business life. For the first time, high schools became entered into state law and became Chapter 3872, No. 26 of the 1885 Constitution: "An Act to Establish a Uniform System of Common Schools and County High Schools." It was a goal of Superintendent Russell to have at least one graded high school in every county. When he left office, three years later in January of 1893, he claimed there were seventeen high schools,<sup>112</sup> but Sheats maintained that as of 1894, Duval High remained the only real high school in the state.<sup>113</sup> By a strict definition of a graded high school of quality, Sheats was probably right--there was only one high school in Florida in 1894, not seventeen. Still the United States Commissioner's report for 1890 shows that public high schools were in operation in almost all towns where private academies had heretofore existed.<sup>114</sup> More important, then, than the actual number of true, quality high schools was that several ideas were being associated with them. First, was that Floridians

should have more than an elementary education. Second, was that a high school should have four years of study to it, and should teach fairly consistent subject matter at uniform levels across the state. Most impressive was that free, public education had for all practical purposes replaced privately funded education.

Finally, with the institution of public high schools, Florida entered the modern educational age. It was the interaction between the various levels of education that caused the "system" to begin working together. The attention to high schools and the graded aspect of their operation put even more attention to grading the common schools. In essence, education was now beyond the idea that it was only the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Now education was being perceived as something that prepared one for life in the business community, or for work in the next higher level, or grade, of the same subject. It became necessary to have a good common school education in order to be successful in the high school curriculum which took four more years before it was possible to master the college curriculum. It was this interdependence and need for standardization that caused Russell to require a "uniform system" of schools in his law. This interdependence was what was so confounding and wonderful about the Russell era to early historians. The interdependence and the uniformity caused them to see collectively Russell's greatest contribution to the state as

one that provided for a single,<sup>115</sup> continuous,<sup>116</sup> intertwined,<sup>117</sup> interwoven,<sup>118</sup> system of free public education. In part because of Russell's efforts in this area, Nita Katherine Pyburn named Russell "Father of the Graded School."<sup>119</sup>

When Albert J. Russell took office in February, 1884, there was in force only a very primitive educational system at best. In 1884, there were only 1,267 schools provided for by the State.<sup>120</sup> All these were common schools, and almost all were ungraded. There was only one high school, and it was in his county. Normal departments had been legislated for the two seminaries in 1883, but they were legislated into institutions that "were schools, not colleges."<sup>121</sup> There was no provision for the severely handicapped, for the blind and the deaf. And overall in this rather primitive system, there was very little money, less public support, and no standard curriculum. By the time Russell left office, he had more drastically changed the education of Florida than any other person, before or since. Common schools went from 1,267 to 2,368, almost doubling in number. Teachers increased from 1,128 to 2,782.<sup>122</sup> But not only had teachers increased in number, they had increased greatly in quality. Most had received a better education, and at public expense, than their predecessors. All had received instruction in how to teach and all had a professional journal to read and an organization to represent their interests. There was a

normal college for each race, free to all accepted. Most institutions of higher learning provided for teacher education as part of their programs. And finally, as important as anything else, the odious taint of charity had all but vanished from the public schools.

In St. Augustine the survival of the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind seemed to be secured. Sixty-two students were in attendance in 1892, and as standard practice Superintendent Russell had each county superintendent transfer to him the name of every blind and deaf person in the county. Largely due to his efforts, circulars and personal attention, the school was no longer mistrusted by parents. In every annual report to the governor, Russell spoke at length about the accomplishments there.

Besides providing for a system of high schools in the state, the School Law of 1889 specified and simplified the administration of a comprehensive, state-wide system of public education. One of its real strengths was that it operated with a combination of a strong, centralized<sup>123</sup> and local power bases.<sup>124</sup> Cochran felt that the growth of Russell's system was aided by generous, legislatively approved expenditures. In fact, according to Cochran, "there were but two scholastic years from 1884 to 1892 in which the public-school expenditure did not exceed that of the year just proceeding." Expenditures of Russell's years, he adds, doubled that of any other administration. Increased prosperity of the State was one reason.

However, it was due principally to the growth of public sentiment in favor of universal education, for the annual expenditure for public schools had increased some faster than the school population and the average daily attendance, and much faster than the total population and wealth of the State.<sup>125</sup>

One of the provisions of the New School Law was that beyond a state levy of one mill on all real and personal property, each county was to determine its own levy of between three and five mills. Out of forty-five counties, over one-third taxed themselves the maximum, six were only slightly under at four and one-half and eighteen levied at more than the minimum. Only five counties were content with the minimum tax rate. "Thus," reported Russell, "is spoken in unmistakable terms the will of the people in reference to the maintenance and improvement of their schools by taxes."<sup>126</sup>

In spite of all these gains in public education however, and after almost nine years of service under three different governors, Albert J. Russell was not renominated as State Superintendent at the 1892 State Democratic Convention in Tampa. Forces beyond Florida education, indeed forces beyond Florida politics affected the nominating process. Nationally, a populist party, the Farmers' Alliance, was riding the peak of popular support. The Alliance platform called for economic reconsideration for farmers and small businessmen who were largely controlled by giant railroad and banking interests. In 1890

the Farmer's Alliance held its national convention in Ocala.<sup>127</sup> Its platform, known as the "Ocala Demands" was recognized nationally. In Florida, anti-Bourbon Democrat sentiments found an encouraging voice in the Alliance movement. At the State Democratic Convention in 1892, Alliancemen represented almost two-thirds of the delegates attending, enough to control nominations and the party platform.<sup>128</sup> Under such conditions, the Democrats had to make many concessions to these populists in order to prevent the emergence of the Alliance as a third party. The Times-Union summed up the political situation at the State Democratic Convention:

All alliancemen are essentially third party men, on one conditions, to wit: If the other political parties...refuse to make equitable concessions, the alliance will be forced to appeal to the country on its own behalf. The salient features of the Ocala platform will be presented to this convention for endorsement, and if the Democratic party in convention assembled does not make a just concession, there will undoubtedly be a third party in Florida, and the alliance will welcome it. Some members will, of course, sever their connection with the order and vote with their old party, but the alliance, as a body, will go with the third party, if it cannot elsewhere gain its demands.<sup>129</sup>

Edward C. Williamson reported several concessions on the part of the Democrats to the Alliancemen.

Two of its most prominent members were nominated for cabinet posts: C.B. Collins of Marion county for State Treasurer and W.M. Sheats of Alachua County for Superintendent of Public



Instruction. Highly pleased with the concession gained at the Tampa convention, conservative Alliancemen asserted that the threat of a third-party movement had been averted.<sup>130</sup>

When Superintendent Russell left office January 3, 1894, he was less than two weeks away from his sixty-fourth birthday. Undoubtedly, his age and enormous effort he had put into Florida education had tired him. Letters from his office in Tallahassee were fewer than in the beginning of his administration and no longer characterized by the passionate spirit of his earlier days. He was being replaced by a younger and more aggressive man who had been eyeing the position for many years. Unquestionably the two men were well acquainted with each other. William M. Sheats had been Superintendent in Alachua county for the past twelve years, beginning office in a time when county superintendents were not well-known for their commitment and efficiency in office. Alachua was the seat of the East Florida Seminary. Russell had named Sheats principal of one or two normal schools in 1887. Sheats had attended the very first State Teachers Institute in 1887, and in fact, had been nominated as president of the first statewide teachers' organization.<sup>131</sup> In 1888 Russell responded to a letter from Sheats involving in part, a school census. Both their letters acknowledged a tentative bid on Sheats' part for the State office, which was then, as a consequence of the 1885 Constitution, an elective office. Sheats' interest in the job, according to Russell,

did not disturb me in the least. As you remark, the salary is uninviting; it is a disgrace to the State and has been so remarked in some of the Northern educational papers, especially so when a member has to break up home and come here. I have already, my home broken up entirely, my business relations disrupted and I am near larger interests in the Florida Phosphate and Fertilizer Company which I hope to develop largely so that I can afford to remain if elected....<sup>132</sup>

Russell remained the choice of the Democrats in the Convention of 1892, but two-thirds of the Convention was made up of Alliancemen and Sheats was their candidate.<sup>133</sup> Riding the crest of an overwhelming popularity for himself and his school system, Russell undoubtedly had mixed feelings about leaving office. After a bevy of tributes and adulations from countless teacher organizations, Russell undoubtedly began looking homeward. Russell had loved to look out from the roof of the capitol building and allow his eyes to follow the rolling hills and trees from every point of the compass.<sup>134</sup> But Jacksonville was home and God had given his home a

beautiful peninsula of land as a place of rest to the more weary...a garden of beautiful flowers and delicious fruits, a place of comfort, restitution and subsequent joys.<sup>135</sup>

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CHAPTER EIGHT  
LAST THREE YEARS AND DEATH

In Tampa at a State Teachers' Association meeting, almost exactly one year from the day the State Superintendent would step down from office, Albert J. Russell was making his annual address to the state's educators. According to the Tampa Tribune, Major Russell was in his happiest mood. And yet, in this happiest of moods, all the while punctuating his speech with humorous illustrations, a chill must have passed over him in front of the state assemblage of teachers and hundreds of citizens. At the part when he was explaining how the true value of a teacher's work can take years, even a lifetime to realize, he spoke some of the words that would later be found carved into the granite of his tombstone. Since he characteristically spoke extemporaneously, he had not planned to speak of his metaphor for death--the Dark River--but on that night in front of his favorite people, and as their leader speaking of their favorite cause, death, the final act, rose to the surface of his mind and tumbled out of his mouth.

You will not know until you  
cross the river, which looks  
so dark to us all, and so wide  
and so turbulent, but which to  
the faithful will be lighted and  
calmed by the affluence of the  
glorious radiance of Him who  
had redeemed us, not until you  
shall be safe on the other side  
shall you begin to know.<sup>1</sup>

Two years later, documents reveal this metaphor, this allusion to death as the dark river was still with him. At a meeting of the Grand Lodge in 1893, as Grand Secretary, Russell was paying tribute to an officer of the Lodge who had recently died.

My brother has crossed the dark  
river, I trust, finding its  
darkness dispelled by the radiance  
of the face of the Grand Architect  
of the Universe, to whom his work  
had been delivered, to be tried  
by the Measure and Square, and  
may we not trust has met the  
welcome in words, "pass in."<sup>2</sup>

It was symbolically significant, or psychologically reassuring to Russell that there be a light, a guide, a welcoming party to greet and lead the traveler across the Dark River. "I love the sunshine, the light," he once wrote. One of his favorite Bible verses was the fifth verse of the last chapter of Revelation, "And there shall be no night there."<sup>3</sup>

On November 30, 1895, Russell was returning a letter to Confederate General J.J. Finley. He was wishing the General good health and long life, but also that the General's last years should be quiet, peaceful years spent in comfort and contemplation. "And now under the very laws of nature itself, as your gaze must be fixed upon the Western horizon of life's limit, may I not pray to Our Father to make it resplendent...." Russell continued his wish "that the coming years may be after all the best, the most joyful." On the other side of those last best and joyful years was the Dark River. "After all,

Dear General, the Dark River so much dreaded by many is very narrow, and illuminated on the opposite shore with the very Glory of Him who declares, 'It is finished'."4

Who could know what Russell was thinking and feeling on that day in the midst of that letter to an aging Confederate General facing the western horizon of his own life's limit? In six more weeks, Russell himself would be dead.

Since leaving Tallahassee, Russell had spent the last three years as an aged, respected statesman. They were three years of speeches, laying of corner-stones, church work and public service. Julia, his wife of thirty years of which next to nothing is known, had died a little over a year after they had returned to Jacksonville. Extracts of letters written during this period reveal long passages of contemplation and heightened spiritual awareness.

All around him signs of age and death served as constant reminders of the end of an age, an era, and a century. The Confederacy had become slow walking men with canes, whose memories were revived in letters, memorial addresses and poems. By the next gubernatorial election, the first non-soldier Confederate would be governor.<sup>5</sup> The South would remain solidly Democrat for another three-quarters of a century, but affiliation with the Grand Cause was no longer a pre-requisite to political recognition. Promotions continued to pour out of the command center of the United Confederate Veterans, their announcements read in the pages of an old soldier's journal,

the Confederate Veteran.<sup>6</sup> Increasingly, letters published in the Veteran for the purpose of locating comrades in arms, or ladies who had nursed the wounded on battlefields and in hospitals almost thirty-five years before, had the clause "if still living" entered into the requests.<sup>7</sup>

For his part of the legacy, Russell had lobbied the legislature, written letters and made speeches in order to stimulate interest in the creation of a home in Jacksonville for Confederate veterans. The Florida Home was finally established, and the legislature appropriated up to \$2,500 for annual maintenance.<sup>8</sup> Major Russell was named President of the Board of Trustees with his old friend, comrade in arms and ex-governor F.P. Fleming, also on the Board.<sup>9</sup> After Russell's death, Fleming assumed the Presidency and remained active in the care of the Home's operations for years to come.<sup>10</sup>

The days of Jacksonville as the major tourism center of Florida had also come to an end. The yellow fever epidemic of 1888, and the railroad's penetration through the city, across the St. Johns River and on to St. Augustine had combined to deflect Florida visitors and their fantasies away from Jacksonville. Even the town's impressive effort of reviving the industry at the Sub-Tropical Exposition had failed, its airy meeting rooms, halls, and courtyards less and less vibrant with each convention.<sup>11</sup>

The first automobile had yet to come to Jacksonville; its arrival was six months after Russell's death.<sup>12</sup> The

town was still a busy, bustling industrial center, politically still powerful, whose population continued to grow, yet an era and the nineteenth century was drawing to an end. Taken out of an office, away from the political, business and educational world in which he had been so prominent, Russell became increasingly contemplative. Increasingly people began looking on him as a representative of that era, and Major Russell continued to be a favorite guest and speaking dignitary.

His mental and physical prowess must have remained strong, for Russell continued to be active throughout the community. On June 23, 1895, roughly six months before he died, Russell dedicated the corner-stone for the new Grand Lodge. There was an overflow crowd and Grand Secretary Russell was to speak from a porch of the building. A threatening heavy shower materialized in the dark skies over Jacksonville. Quickly an improvised stage was set up for Russell. Inside the hall which could hold but half the crowd, in a room filled to standing room only, Russell spoke for two solid hours entertaining his rain-soaked audience by "delivering one of the most eloquent and masterly Masonic addresses and perhaps the best of his life."<sup>13</sup>

In October, Russell, some fourteen months after Julia's death, married Abbey M. Baker.<sup>14</sup> Most of the letters she published after his death show Russell thought constantly of his relationship to God. Several times, even at the peak of his public visibility and political life, Russell often

repeated an oath he had made to honor God and his blessings. "I never make a public speech without trying to honor God and bless my fellow men."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, surviving records of every address Russell made had in them a heartfelt appreciation and reverence for God. He once wrote about a trip he had made with the National Education Association in 1887 to Yellowstone Park. There in the valley of the Yellowstone River with some teachers, Russell decided the beautiful spot needed to be named. When asked what he would call it, Russell answered, "I would call it 'Earth's great vestibule to the court of Heaven,' for who can stand here and gaze upon this and not feel that he is in the presence of the Almighty through His wondrous works."<sup>16</sup> In one letter he recounts consoling a family of his church about the death of its husband and father. The bereaved widow had sent her son after Major Russell. The family wept. Russell said, in counseling them, he took them to the grave of Lazarus, to see the weeping Redeemer, to the bedside of Jairus' daughter, to Calvary, and finally...to the open tomb of Christ. Then they knelt together and prayed. Afterwards, the widow and daughter wept, but it was quiet tears, he said, of peace and trust.

As I walked to my home I felt so happy, so peaceful, so complacent. I had been with God, with His wounded and sorely afflicted children, and to me it seemed He was saying 'my child, my child' and to me that was sweet, more glorious work and experience than striving for public honors.<sup>17</sup>

In many respects in Russell's last months he became like an ancient Zen warrior. In his life he had built homes and buildings, in the winter he warmed his carpenter's hands over wood scrap fires, and in the summer he rested in the shadows of newly erected walls and under the live oaks throughout the city. He had worked beneath the surface of water, in the hulls of ships joining ribs and joists with wooden hammers. He had run through waves of dying men, under concussion and white smoke of cannon, and had screamed with thousands of throats the chilling war cry of the Confederate armies. He had helped rebuild his war-torn city, risen to prominence and served his state in politics and beneficent acts. He had then presided over a wilderness in a land of flowers, devoid of education and filled with prejudices against it. The wilderness was civilized, and every part bore his touch and his name. Major Russell could not walk a block without being recognized and hailed at every turn. And yet this famed person humbled himself constantly in the face of God and sought always to be His servant. Like the Zen warrior he meditated; like the Christian he meditated on God's mysteries.

I have just spent a half-hour with my geraniums, twenty-three in number, so fresh and blooming...How many beautiful lessons they teach the thoughtful mind! When trodden upon they emit more strongly their sweet fragrance. To live, some of them, all hidden and overgrown by stronger plants, yet bloom and send forth their sweetness unseen and unsung, as the sweet violet, the humblest of all the flowers, often blooming beneath the

larger exogenous, unseen; but when plucked and held to the light and warmth of the sun, exhibit the most quieting and delicate of all tints, emitting in exhaustless generosity the sweetest perfume.<sup>18</sup>

Major Russell had become so contemplative, so comfortable in his esteemed position in the community that he even had the time and inclination to accept invitations to ladies' afternoon teas. Still, life's mysteries and his relationship to God continued to fill his thoughts. His relationship to God after life on the eve of his sixty-seventh birthday was especially thought provoking. In the final moment of his letter to General Finley, after Russell repeated his dread of the Dark River, he then unknowingly penned his own epitaph.

I fancy there are loved ones waiting  
on the other side with lamps taken  
from the altar of God, which they  
hold aloft as they shout "this way"  
to us who may be crossing.<sup>19</sup>

A week after this letter Russell paid a visit to the county hospital to visit and speak to the sick. In his talk Russell told of a great throng pressed close to the throne of God. The throng was dressed in spotless white robes and, as it turned out, the hundred and forty-four thousand there were those who had entered heaven as a result of great tribulations. John the Baptist, part of this story, then said, "Tell the suffering ones of earth to hold fast their faith. A glorious time is coming for them, as they shall stand before the throne in the very presence of God who redeemed them."<sup>20</sup> This was the last public talk Albert J.



Russell would ever give on earth. As the city prepared itself for Christmas, a foreboding slowly came over him and would not go away. Ahead of him he heard a murmur, then voices, and then a turbulent rushing. As he neared, he could see for himself the narrow, troubled waters of the Dark River.

With the new year's passing, Russell became increasingly ill. On the ninth of January, Abbey revealed the seriousness of her husband's illness.<sup>21</sup> Eventually, confined to bed, Russell had himself taken to the chambers of the Grand Lodge.<sup>22</sup> As he lay there dying, Masons slipped into his room and looked down at the most popular and revered member of their fraternity. "It comes to this," some of them must have thought; "It always comes to this." Once Russell rallied. But, "then he sank rapidly when the disease seemed stayed. Thereafter, hope and fear held equal sway, until...."<sup>23</sup>

This time the rushing did not go away. Louder and louder it grew until first his feet, then his whole body was sucked into the turbulent waters of the dark river. Faintly he heard voices behind him; lodge members were calling his name. He started to turn but up ahead in a bright glow of upheld lanterns, a group of loved ones waved to him. "This way," they shouted, "This way."

Major Russell died early in the morning of January 17, 1896, two weeks after his sixty-seventh birthday. He died

early enough that the waiting Times-Union was able to print his obituary in its morning paper.<sup>24</sup> It was a lengthy piece and at its top read the headline "Albert J. Russell Dead." Much of the obituary told how the Major had led a battalion of troops across Georgia into the advances of Sherman's army. It spoke of his advance to the state capital as State Superintendent. It spoke of his many good works and of the love all of Florida had for him.

For two days his body lay in an open casket in the meeting hall of the Grand Lodge. Citizens, his wife, and Masons whispered and filed by singly and in groups.<sup>25</sup> Outside the lodge, people everywhere prepared to pay their respects to Major Russell. The city and all its officials readied for the funeral.

On January 21, five days after he crossed the Dark River, Major Russell was buried. According to the Times-Union, the largest funeral procession in the history of Jacksonville was held for its beloved Major Russell. The Masonic Hall was wrapped in mourning. From there his casket was carried in procession through crowds of citizens who lined the winding route to the church. After the services, another procession was formed. This time the cortege consisted of in full or in part, city policemen, the Second Battalion Band, Odd Fellows, the Masonic Grand Lodge, Knights of Honor, United Confederate Veterans, members of the R.E. Lee camp, trustees of the Confederate Veteran's Home, Grand Army of the Republic, Sons of Temperance,

Jacksonville Light Infantry, Jacksonville Rifles, the City Council and Mayor, city officials, ex-governor Fleming, and virtually every civic organization in the city. The cortege walked with heavy tread to the city cemetery. After the internment services, the Masons each threw into the grave sprigs of evergreens, symbols of their lasting memories for Major Russell. The service concluded with the throwing of three shovels full of earth into the open grave.<sup>26</sup> And then it was over.

# Notes

1 Mrs. Albert J. Russell, (ed.), The Life and Labors of A.J. Russell (Jacksonville, 1897), 103.

2 Ibid., 347.

3 Ibid., 348.

4 Ibid., 359.

5 Linda D. Vance, May Mann Jennings: Florida's Genteel Activist (Gainesville, 1985), 28.

6 Confederate Veteran, III, (January, 1895), 15.

7 Ibid.

8 Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida Chapter 4250, No. 136. (Tallahassee, 1893), 191.

9 Confederate Veteran, III, (December, 1895), 382.

10 Thea Wells, "Records of the Old Confederate Home," Two Volumes. (1987) Hayden Burns Library, Jacksonville.

11 T. Frederick Davis, History of Early Jacksonville Florida (Jacksonville, 1911), 191.

12 Ibid., 379.

13 Russell, Life and Labors, 335-36.

14 Ibid., 343.

15 Ibid., 348.

16 Ibid., 349.

17 Ibid., 354-355.

18 Ibid., 351.

19 Ibid., 359.

20 Ibid., 361.

21 Ibid., 338.

22 Death Certificate. Florida Department of Vital Statistics. Place of Death listed as corner of Bridge (now Broad) and Forsyth. This was the location of the Masonic Temple.

- 23 Russell, Life and Labors, 337.
- 24 Florida Times-Union, January 17, 1896.
- 25 Ibid., January 22, 1896.
- 26 Ibid.

## CHAPTER NINE SUMMATION OF RUSSELL'S CONTRIBUTIONS

When Major Russell left office in 1893 he left behind an educational system in Florida much improved from the one he inherited almost nine years earlier. His legacy should probably be made up of three main contributions. First, more than any other educator before or since, Major Russell popularized public education. Secondly, he professionalized its teachers and administrators. Finally, he organized and coordinated the different levels of the educational system so that for the first time in Florida, it was possible for a pupil to be educated all the way from elementary classes through a university degree, and all at public expense. Also, as several educational historians have said, Major Albert J. Russell was responsible for entering Florida education into the modern educational age.

In the years before and after the Civil War public education was an idea either foreign or controversial to most people. Public education was perceived as a threat to basic American freedoms--the freedom of thought, democracy and a liberal education. Also, for the vast majority of early Americans, education beyond two or three years of schooling was simply deemed unnecessary. There was yet another reason for the controversy. In the years after the Civil War, especially in the South, whites were reluctant

to send their children to public schools, primarily due to the Reconstruction emphasis on the education of blacks.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, a popular perception among whites was that, since the vast majority of blacks did not work, and paid little or no taxes, the white population was forced to support black schools through white tax money.

Major Albert J. Russell changed public opinion into a more favorable attitude toward public, free education. Two contemporaries of Russell testified to this point. Ex-governor Harrison Reed said Russell and his efforts to promote public education gained favor because the people "responded to the call of a Confederate soldier, and not a carpetbagger."<sup>2</sup> Another contemporary, William M. Sheats, who succeeded Russell as State Superintendent, said, "In arousing the popular mind to a proper appreciation of the public schools... Superintendent Russell was better suited to the work and succeeded beyond any of his predecessors."<sup>3</sup>

Contemporaries aside, statistics alone can validate the increased acceptance of public education during Russell's administration. According to the The Florida Teacher:

In the last annual report made by his predecessor, Hon E.K. Foster, in 1882 the number of public schools reported for 1890-91 makes the number of schools 2,348, nearly double those reported by his predecessor. The whole amount of money expended for public instruction, reported by Mr. Foster was \$133,260. Maj. Russell reports the sum raised and expended as \$564,304.65. The total school attendance reported in 1882 was 51,945 youth. In 1891-92 there is reported 94,019 youth. The number of

teachers employed in 1882 was 1,128.  
The number employed in 1891-92 was 2,641.<sup>4</sup>

Increase in population undoubtedly accounted for some of what the Teacher referred to as "phenomenal growth," but as Cochran said:

It was due principally to the growth of public sentiment in favor of universal education, for the annual expenditure for public schools had increased some faster than the school population and the average daily attendance, and much faster than the total population and wealth of the State.<sup>5</sup>

Professionalization of teachers and administrators is another major contribution of Superintendent Russell. Less than twenty years before Russell took office in 1884, there was no separate state official with primary responsibility for public schools. And, once the office was established in 1868, no less than seven men held the office between 1868 and 1877, a period of nine years. All of these men complained about the lack of qualified county administrators and teachers. The History of the Florida Education Association, an organization which has named Albert J. Russell the "Father of the F.E.A.," describes the setting for Russell's first state-wide assemblage of teachers and administrators in DeFuniak Springs in February, 1886.

It will be difficult for our modern teachers even to imagine the conditions under which these 1886 delegates labored. In 1884, Florida had about 58,000 pupils, but only 60% of them actually attended school for an average school term of 82 days. The voters had adopted a new State Constitution to go into effect in 1887, which did indeed give some hope for the future;



for instance, as much as five mills county tax for schools, if the board agreed. The Jacksonville Herald cried that that was too much money!

There was no State course of study. Most of the teachers were "certificated" by county school boards; the certificate was good in the county in which issued, and for one year. The state superintendent could issue the "first grade certificates," i.e., a higher certificate good in what were then called high schools. But of the 1653 teachers in the state, only 73 held this superior form of certificate.

There were no "normal schools" in Florida.... Those DeFuniak Springs-bound 1886 teachers had a monthly wage ranging from \$20 in Gadsden County to a high of \$77.50 in Polk County and in each of these counties a term of five months--the highest in the State. Thus it appears that they did not have much to look forward to, nor much to attempt teaching with.

"Education was no career then, save for a few who moved into administration (such as it was and only part-time), or who taught in the institutions of higher learning (such as they were--mainly secondary in curriculum, and sadly housed). Almost all of the public school teaching in those years was elementary, and in one-room schools.<sup>6</sup>

Before Major Russell left Duval County for Tallahassee as State Superintendent, he had organized the first professional educational organization in the state--the Duval County Teacher's Association.<sup>7</sup> Within two years of taking office as State Superintendent, Russell organized the Florida State Teacher's Association; and the following year, largely due to his efforts as State Superintendent, Florida's first professional publication, the Florida School Journal, went to press. But perhaps even more important

than organizing professional associations and publications were Russell's contributions toward making them acceptable and attractive to teachers who were largely fearful and suspicious of teacher training efforts. Teacher Institutes, which taught teachers how to teach before there were education classes and colleges, were as unpopular with teachers as public schools were unpopular with most of the state's populace. According to Russell,

The poverty of most teachers, the inconvenience of travel and strange impression that these Institutes were to be places and times of severe test and examination, rather than opportunities of aid and instruction, had kept many away.<sup>8</sup>

By the time Russell left office in 1893, teacher education was a well-established fact in Florida for both black and white teachers. Not only were teachers trained and educated, but there was a certification process in force which not only regulated who could teach, but ranked them according to their qualifications and abilities to teach. Years before he left office, Superintendent Russell reported to the governor:

The day for the 'old school master with his green spectacles and buckhorn handled cane and birchen rod' has passed, and the day for real teachers has come.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, when Russell took office in 1884, the educational system was almost entirely made up of one-room common, or elementary schools. For the most part, these schools were ungraded and offered no more than three years

of instruction. What Superintendent Russell did to common schools was to add five years to the course of study and "graded" each year so that, increasingly, Floridians began to regard an elementary education as one which required eight years of study.

Russell can also be given credit for gaining popular acceptance of yet another novel idea: high schools. Once people began to accept public schools, and then that public schools should last eight years instead of three, Russell managed to convince the public that a high school education was necessary to complement the elementary. This action of adding high schools to the system not only added four more years of education to the curriculum, but it more emphasized the interrelationship of the two levels. Statewide, curriculum became more standardized and uniform among the various grade levels. One grade began to prepare students for the next higher grade just as elementary schools worked to prepare students for high schools.

Next, Russell was a strong proponent of higher education, constantly lamenting the fact that Florida "has entrusted to distant states a work which is her own duty to perform."<sup>10</sup> In the face of much adversity and apathy Russell worked to secure the survival, even the prosperity of Florida's first true public institution of higher education, the State Agricultural College at Lake City. Then, under his administration two normal colleges (one for whites and one for blacks) began operation. These two

institutions played a vital role in supplying the ever expanding school system with qualified, trained and professional educators. Also during Russell's term, the two existing seminaries emerged as true post-secondary institutions discarding their classification as "mere high schools". By 1889 it was possible, for the first time in Florida for a student to graduate from a graded, four-year high school, after having completed eight years of elementary schools, and then have the option of going on into a state university for a baccalaureate or technical degree, and all at public expense.

In that same year, 1889, a bill framed by Superintendent Russell was made into law. It was this act, the School Law of 1889, "An Act to Establish a Uniform System of Common Schools and of County High Schools," that entered Florida education into the modern educational age. This law called for many things, principal among them was the call for elected (rather than appointed) school officials, two normal colleges, a permanent state school fund, (made up of a fixed state tax and a variable county tax), grading all existing and providing schools at least one high school in every county.

Major Russell can also be given credit for the survival and prosperity of the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine. According to The Florida Teacher:

During the first year of his work, in 1884, he planned and had erected the buildings for the Institute for the Deaf and Mutes of

the State and organized and equipped it and started it out upon its glorious mission to these afflicted children of the State. He has watched it with almost parental care and anxiety and has seen it grow and its numbers increase in attendance. He has seen these terribly afflicted youths from almost a total mental and spiritual darkness, to be able to work intelligibly in figures, to read, and especially to read the wondrous story of the cross, to write, and thus communicate with their parents, to be taught typography, photography, carpentry and gardening. This to the boys, and housewifery, sewing, ornamental and useful to the girls, and to the great triumph of this heart has heard the hitherto dumb speak and recite prayers.<sup>11</sup>

Educational contributions aside, Major Russell would still be considered a remarkable man who contributed much to his adopted state of Florida. In the roughly thirty-six years between his arrival in Florida and his death, Russell made his presence felt throughout the entire state. Russell was a soldier in the Civil War; by war's end he commanded a battalion of troops agitating the advances of Sherman's march to the sea. After the war, ex-governor Harrison Reed called Major Russell "the leading contractor in restoring the waste places in Jacksonville." He then became the city's first chief of the Volunteer Fire Department, a city councilman, a newspaper editor, a Grand Master of the Masons, Duval County Superintendent of Schools and then, State Superintendent of Public Instruction. In between these years he became known throughout the state as "the silver-tongued orator of Florida." His oratorical skills were used to extoll the virtues of Florida, the Democratic

Party, the evils of intoxicants, the glory of God, the need for peace between the divided sections of the country in the years after the Civil War, and the inextricable relationship between Democracy and public education. In his last three years he buried his first wife of some thirty years, Julia; was elected Grand Secretary of the Masons, started the Florida Confederate Home for aged and homeless veterans; and married Abbey M. Baker only two months before he died.

As good a summary of Albert J. Russell that can be given are the last words of the tribute offered by the Florida Teacher:

...the State can never pay the debt due this devoted man. Ostentation has been conspicuously absent, in all this work; a warm affectionate heart and glowing mind have been conspicuous, while he has publicly, privately, always, everywhere given the glory and honor of his success to God and His grace.

When the work and life of this man shall have been finished and mother earth holds him in her embrace, awaiting the call to high duty, many men and many women will speak his praises from loving hearts and the blessed results of his work will live on and on.<sup>12</sup>

Epilogue

For almost nine years Russell's body lay beside Julia's. Then in 1905, Abbey arranged to have his casket transferred to adjoin her own, some thirty-five yards away.<sup>13</sup> Today, what is referred to as the Old City Cemetery is not on the edge of the city, but in a defeated, run-down and mixed zoning area of downtown Jacksonville. There is a small, hand painted sign nailed to a camphor tree that says

Old City Cemetery  
Hrs. 8am-5pm  
Police Patrolled.

The paint has long since faded, and only the ghosts of its letters remain to warn vandals of police patrols. Not infrequently, homeless people scoop out small, shallow holes in the graveyard for fires on winter nights. When it's not raining, small clusters of underprivileged boys play basketball in a neighboring concrete court. There are no baskets for the two hoops; the posts are pitted and rusted in the broken concrete. Once a year, descendents of Confederate veterans make a pilgrimage to the portion of the cemetery set aside for the war dead. They fire three volleys of blanks into the air, and for a brief moment, the glories of the Confederacy are revived on the basketball court and on the front porches of the ghetto homes that line the cemetery. The cheaper stones of the Confederate enlisted are among the most worn and pitted, but everywhere in the cemetery headstones are fading. Many have tumbled

over, and as many lie at odd and sad angles to the earth they mark. Occasionally there is a more impressive stone, grander than the others. Occasionally there is a curled, sleeping lamb carved in stone that tells of a child's death and inconsolable parents. And in a hundred stones, barely now readable, are the words

Gone, But Not Forgotten.

But the truth is, most are already forgotten. And even though Albert J. Russell's stone is grander than most, he too is forgotten. And yet what is especially tragic is that the three stones marking his grave are almost a museum in themselves. A museum of a most exciting time, and of a most memorable man in Florida history. The largest stone, crested by the compass and square, which he shares with Abbey tells of his Masonic record, his state Superintendency, his Sunday School Superintendency and of his trip across the Dark River.

There was a time when Masons were one of the most powerful political and fraternal organizations in the state. It was the Masons and especially A.J. Russell who argued for buildings of substance, for masonry to replace palm logs and wood framing. It was this philosophy that permitted Jacksonville to have the first brick schoolhouse in Florida. It was their philosophy that made Masonic dedication a must for all important public buildings in the State. The State Superintendency notation speaks of a time when there was little if any public education because of the prejudices



against it. It speaks of the long and involved struggle to overcome these prejudices and replace them not only with schools, but graded schools, elementary and secondary. It tells of the time when Jacksonville led the state in educational opportunities, when Jacksonville had the only real high school in Florida, when Blacks had the best educational opportunities in the state and possibly the nation. The emergence of higher education and practical education are also in this time period. Russell's Sunday School service bespeaks not only of a man's devotion to God, but of a period when Sunday Schools were often the only educational opportunities available to children whose parents were poor or missing. The second stone, the Confederate service marker, speaks of one of the most trying portions of America's history, when a nation divided and entered into the bloodiest, costliest war to date. When it was over, a man's record or position in that war often determined his future for decades. It determined politics for a century. This marker tells also of the occupation of Jacksonville and how those forces burned the city four times. Housed in Jacksonville too, was the Cold Confederate Home where Florida paid homage to its homeless veterans.

The last stone is a long, polished, white marble slab that says only "MAJOR RUSSELL." There are no existing records of how the last stone came to be there; no one can even guess. It is almost as if once the Masons, the Legislature, his church and the Confederacy had their say,

it was not yet enough. Perhaps it was the spirit of the people of Florida who fashioned this mysterious slab of polished marble. Perhaps it was the spirit of tens of thousands of children who would never have gone to school or even had a school to go to without Major Russell. Perhaps it was the spirit of a dozen chambers of commerce whose towns and industries were in part shaped by the man who lectured and wrote of the vast potential of Florida and how to convert its resources into homes, businesses and jobs. Perhaps the spirits knew that a hundred years after his death there would be no Russell Park in DeFuniak Springs, no holiday, no buildings, no bridges, not even a single school to commemorate his service to Florida. Even the historical marker outside the Chautaugua Building in DeFuniak Springs, the marker entitled "Florida Education Association: the Beginning," does not mention Albert J. Russell. Even though the marker is set in what could have been intended as Russell Park, even though he is officially considered "the Father of the F.E.A.," he is not mentioned. Perhaps the mysterious marble slab, unlike any other monument in the cemetery, was put there by the spirits of history who know for many, the good men do lives after them; but the memories of those men are often interred with their bones.

### Notes

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2 Mrs. Albert J. Russell (ed.), The Life and Labors of Albert J. Russell (Jacksonville, 1877), 190.

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6 History of the Florida Education Association 1886-1957 (Tallahassee, 1958), 1.

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8 Bi-Ennial Report, 1885, 4.

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10 Arthur O. White, 100 Years of State Leadership in Florida Education (Tallahassee, 1958), 257.

11 Florida Teacher.

12 Ibid.

13 Interview with Roy Crowther, Grand Historian and Past Grand Master, Most Worshipful Grand Lodge F & A.M. of Florida, Jacksonville., June 17, 1988. "Grave Markers of Duval County 1808-1916." Compiled by Lucy Ames Edwards. (State Library of Florida, 1955), 111-112. There are two grave sites listed for Russell.

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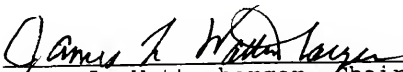
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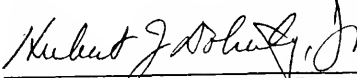
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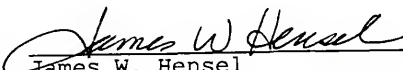
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